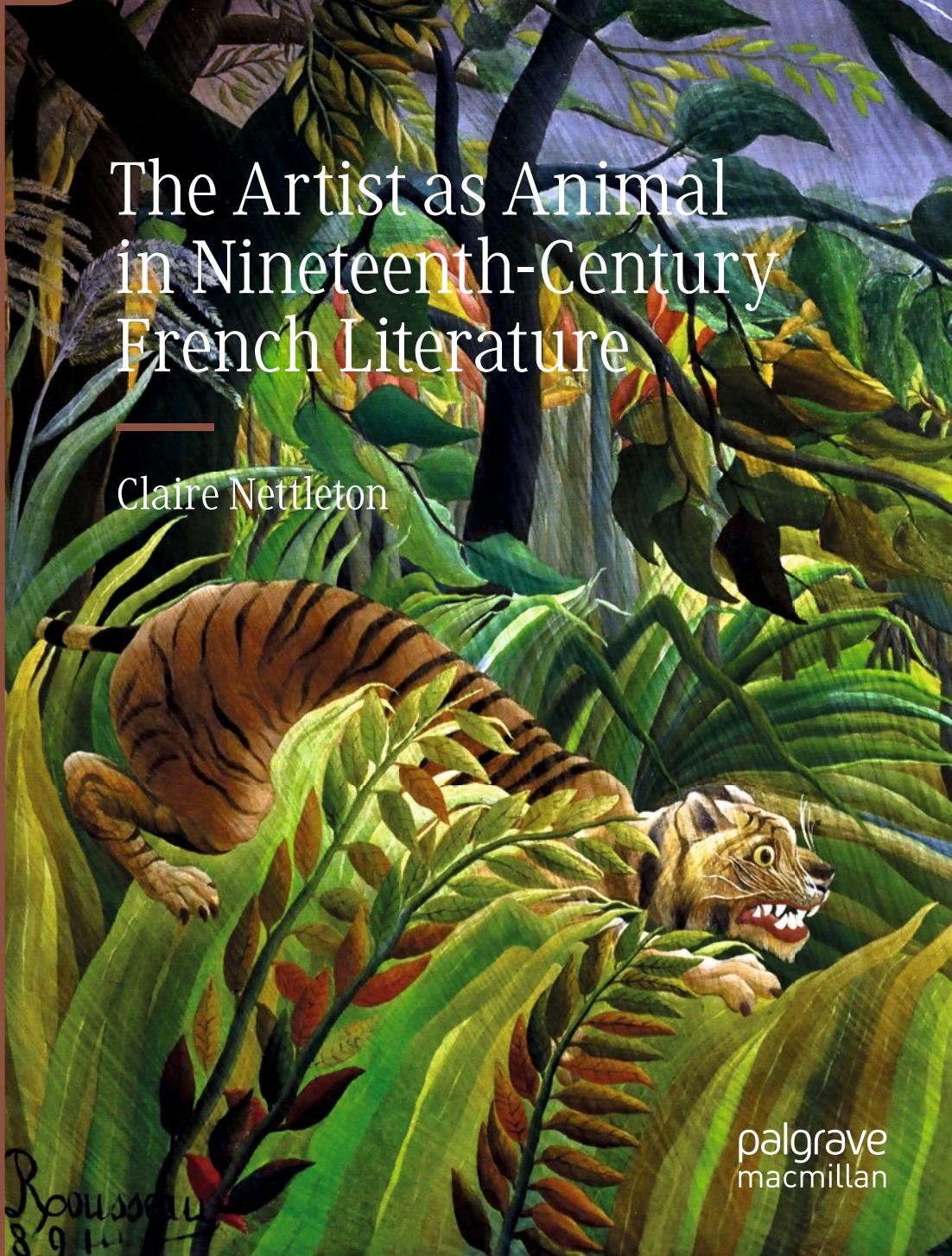




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The Artist as Animal in Nineteenth-Century French Literature

Claire Nettleton



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Various academic disciplines can now be found in the process of executing an ‘animal turn’, questioning the ethical and philosophical grounds of human exceptionalism by taking seriously the nonhuman animal presences that haunt the margins of history, anthropology, philosophy, sociology and literary studies. Such work is characterised by a series of broad, cross-disciplinary questions. How might we rethink and problematise the separation of the human from other animals? What are the ethical and political stakes of our relationships with other species? How might we locate and understand the agency of animals in human cultures?

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The Artist as Animal in Nineteenth- Century French Literature

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Praise for *The Artist as Animal* in Nineteenth-Century French Literature

“Claire Nettleton’s *The Artist as Animal* brings us to the intersection of animal studies, the history of science, aesthetics, and urbanization, and in drawing from these fields, offers fresh insight into the figure of the “animal artist” in the works of the Goncourt brothers, Zola, Laforgue, Mirbeau, and Rachilde. Nettleton’s book shows a fine sensitivity to the changes in urban landscape in the period and marks a significant contribution to the animal studies in French turn-of-the-century fiction. Nettleton is a consummate stylist. Her writing is vibrant and energetic. Readers of her book will find it hard to put it down.”

—Robert Ziegler, *Professor Emeritus of French Literature, Montana Tech, USA*

“Claire Nettleton’s expertly researched and outstandingly argued case for a careful consideration of the animal-artist trope maps important and yet unexplored nodal points in the rise of modern art – compelling, informative, and well written”.

—Giovanni Alois, Art Historian, *School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA*, and Editor in Chief of *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*

“What might a literary history of the Anthropocene look like? What would be its leitmotifs and how would its pictures come to life? Claire Nettleton’s *The Artist as Animal in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* brings together literature, art, and science to broach such territory. Nettleton reveals the interconnections between writers Emile Zola, Jules Laforgue, Octave Mirbeau, and Rachilde, artists Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot, Paul Cézanne and Alfred Sisley, and naturalists Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon, Charles Darwin, Georges Cuvier, and Etienne Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire. The book provides a scintillating take on how nineteenth-century evolutionary theory influenced representations of animal-human relations in French art and literature. With lively prose and vivid imagery, the book follows the winding path of the ‘artist-animal’ through the French cultural landscape of the Second Empire (1852-1870) and the Belle Epoque (1871-1914), showing how this figure prodded society at large to think more ‘animalistically’ than ‘humanistically.’”

—Charissa N. Terranova, *Professor of Visual and Performing Arts, University of Texas at Dallas, USA*

“Claire Nettleton’s *Artist as Animal* brilliantly expands the field of animal studies by bringing it into a compelling conversation with literature and visual studies. Her notion of the animal artist posits at once a subjectivity but also creativity to animals, producing the possibility of imagining animals not as the objects of literature and art, but as their origins.”

—Akira Mizuta Lippit, Vice Dean of Faculty, *School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, USA*

“This timely book presents a unique and original standpoint on the intricate relationships between art and nature in the nineteenth century, filling a gap in the history of art as well as the history of science.”

—François-Joseph Lapointe, *Professor of Biological Sciences and Bioartist, The University of Montreal, Canada*

“Claire Nettleton’s book builds bridges between recent works on the animal question in various regions of the world while retracing historical genealogies of animal perceptions in a French context. By focusing on the collapse of the animal-human divide in nineteenth-century French literature, the author adds an important contribution to a currently flourishing discourse on (anti-) speciesism in critical animal studies.”

—Bénédicte Boisseron, *Associate Professor of Afroamerican and African Studies, University of Michigan, USA*, and author of *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (2018)

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Outside the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, before the entryway to Edgar Degas' pastel ballerinas and Vincent van Gogh's self-portrait, a bronze elephant struggles to free its foot from a trap. Nearby, a horse leaps over a bed of spikes behind a rhinoceros perched on a rock (Fig. 1.1). Museum visitors must pass through this sculpted menagerie, created by Emmanuel Frémiet, Pierre Louis Rouillard and Alfred Jacquemart for the Exposition Universelle in 1878, to access arguably the most renowned impressionist collection in existence.¹ Although these statues guard the former train station that houses the museum, they also suggest that nineteenth-century art is somehow tied to animals. Animal imagery served to destroy the vestiges of the Monarchical and Empirical authority—with its archaic subject matter, rigid and self-serving values and traditions—and provide a gateway to an imagined prehistoric paradise that was the embodiment of freedom. However, these statues are of creatures that are tortured and captured, perhaps illustrating the tragic reality of animals in an urban environment.

To create their sculptures of quadrupeds, Jacquemart studied the caged rhinoceros in the Jardin des Plantes menagerie in Paris, and Frémiet observed elephants behind bars (Vezin 1990, 84–89). Despite their actual conditions in captivity, animals unleashed the artistic imagination. They were so integral to creative practices that several nineteenth-century authors depicted marginal artists as nonhuman animals themselves. From Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's comparison of a bohemian painter to a



Fig. 1.1 Henri-Alfred Jacquemart. *Rhinocéros*, 1878. Photo taken by Claire Nettleton. No copyright

monkey, to Octave Mirbeau's portrayal of van Gogh as a wild beast, the link between animals and vanguard artists became a means of explaining groundbreaking perception that is untainted by cultural knowledge.

In *The Artist as Animal in 19th-Century France*, I argue that the “artist-animal,” an embodiment of creative liberation within an urban setting, is a paradigmatic trope of modernity. The book focuses on the ways in which industrial and urban development of the nineteenth century, coupled with the theory of evolution, caused citizens to reconsider their relationship with other forms of life. While simultaneously inducing anxiety about traditional humanist structures, this crisis of the human subject contributed to groundbreaking literary and aesthetic transformations in which animals play a central role. In readings of novels, poems and essays spanning from the Second Empire (1852–1870) to the Belle Époque (1871–1914), I will uncover to what extent the trope of the “artist-animal” is revolutionary within its own time frame. This project is an examination of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's *Manette Salomon* (1867), Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), Jules Laforgue's “Impressionism” (1883) and “At the Berlin

Aquarium" (written in the 1880s and published posthumously in 1895), Octave Mirbeau's *In the Sky* (published in serial form from 1892 to 1893 and in book format in 1899) and Rachilde's *L'Animale* (1893), which present the creative drives of the second half of the nineteenth century as being "animalistic." This construct—directly opposed to humanistic—indicates the privileging of supposed base instincts and physical needs over rational thought. These works of fiction characterize vanguard artists as animals whose radical vision was uncontaminated by stifling academic traditions and undermined the social, political and artistic order.

Organized chronologically according to the date in which the works were written, *The Artist as Animal* traces the evolution of the fictional relationship between artists and animals from the Second Empire to the *fin de siècle*, which, in many ways, transforms from ambivalent to empowering. The book is thus divided into two parts that illustrate naturalism's uncertainty toward animal behavior as being potentially innovative, yet also marginal or parasitic (the Goncourts, Zola), and Decadence's celebration of the anti-rational and "degenerative" as liberation from social mores (Laforgue, Mirbeau and Rachilde). In the Second Empire, an era of censorship, propaganda and rigid administrative control of not only the arts but all facets of everyday life, animals offered a glimpse of freedom within the confinements of society. Artist-animals in this period thus find creative freedom within a cage.

In the examples of *fin de siècle* literature found in this book, which reinterpreted Darwinian observations, the beasts break free from their bars and devour their zookeepers. In works by Laforgue, Mirbeau and Rachilde, Decadent animals seek to liberate the psyche from societal constraints and to destroy outmoded art and deadening ideologies. In the beginning of the Third Republic (1870–1940), a period of reconstruction, vacillating national identity and radical political struggles for the rights of workers, women and minorities—as well as those of cats, dogs and other victims of vivisection and animal abuse (Kete 1995, 7–16), the definition of "human" (and "humane") was often in flux. Inspired by new developments in biological science, avant-garde artists affirmed multiple perspectives beyond a normative way of seeing. In addition, the extraordinary perception and wild behavior of the avant-garde protagonists were purportedly in tune with the "natural" world, a myth that was created and reinforced by Baron Haussmann's urban reforms of Paris and the growing colonialist expansion of France. Uncorrupted by cultural conditioning, yet dwelling in urban society,

artist-animals also satisfied a burgeoning interest in wilderness as it disappeared from the growing metropolis and fulfilled a cultural need to ease the ever-increasing divide between country and city life.

Furthermore, all of these literary works were published after Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), which decentralized Enlightenment views of the natural world. In the years that followed the French translation of *The Origin of Species* in 1862, the country was inundated with discussions, debates and parodies of Darwin's ideas (Kendall 2009, 293).² As evolution became more accepted, it altered the public and scientific view of man's relationship to other species, demonstrating that humans shared common traits and ancestry with other animals. Debates between Georges Cuvier and Lamarckian scientist Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire regarding comparative anatomy in 1830 had already raised public and literary consciousness about the possibility of the transmutability of species. Although Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck's specific beliefs proved to be false, his *Histoire naturelle des animaux sans vertèbres* (1815–1822) had also illustrated the value of the simplest forms of life (Szyfman 1987, 21).

The Goncourt brothers state that they read Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, the director of the Jardin du Roi and the National Natural History Museum from 1739 to 1788 (Jaussaud and Brygoo 2004, 115), on several occasions. While Buffon's studies on generation come close to indicating a theory of common descent, Buffon ultimately confirms that species are immutable (Buffon 1753, 383). It is due to this ambiguity that this eighteenth-century scientist has a prominent role in the more ambivalent fiction of the Second Empire, including *Manette Salomon* and *Thérèse Raquin*, which carry the theme of containment of both artists and animals. Mirbeau and Laforgue, who had read Lamarck and Darwin, were connected to the impressionist movement and integrated evolutionary theory into their art criticism. In a letter to Monet, Mirbeau reassures the impressionist that art can harness the power of “the movement of inert or invisible things/*le mouvement des choses inertes ou invisibles*,” where paint on a canvas obeys a natural force that can cause it to evolve into an unforeseeable masterpiece beyond the painter's intention (Mirbeau 1990, 244). This crisis of humanistic authority (Whidden 2014, 3) shares parallels with contemporary theory—where the death of the author/painter parallels the death of the “human” as we have known it.

Is this book, then, a study of literature, art, science or cultural history? In my analysis of the works of fiction, notebooks and biographies of the Goncourt brothers, Zola, Laforgue, Mirbeau and Rachilde, it has been

impossible to separate the disciplines, as all had read natural science and had known and defended contemporary visual artists of their time. As examples of *ekphrasis*, a term to describe the symbiotic influence of the visual arts and the literary arts, these authors “painted” urban figures and country retreats in their prose. Impressionism inspired a fragmented aesthetic of vibrant colors, which shifted to soft pastels in the evening light. Literary impressionism offered this movement a narrative—an explanation, a voice. While Rachilde was not directly connected to the impressionists, she hosted salons which Paul Gauguin as well as writers, theater directors and performers attended (*Mélanges Rachilde* 1983, 77). The impact of the natural sciences on artistic narratives expanded the artistic and literary focus beyond humankind. The newfound scientific focus on the struggles of even the most primordial species to survive and reproduce mirrored the struggle of the minor artist—the impressionist, especially—to express a new vision that defied cultural norms.

1.1 THE ARTIST AS ANARCHIST

The origin of impressionism is a legend of individualism, synonymous with infamy-turned-cultivation, forever tied to France but inspirational worldwide. In 1874, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot, Paul Cézanne and Alfred Sisley organized their own independent exhibition in photographer Nadar’s studio, which favored contemporary figures *en plein air* rather than historical or mythical subjects. The press slammed the movement for its blurred renderings of contemporary life—calling the painters “madmen,” “blind” and even “animals.” In a review of an exhibition on April 14, 1877, one critic, Gonzaguet-Privat, linked Monet and the impressionists to monkeys—with an uneducated vision and sloppy execution (Berson 1996, 149). Literary masters such as Zola, Charles Baudelaire, Mirbeau and J.K. Huysmans defended the artists while simultaneously reinforcing their status as outcasts. They explained their fragmented figures whirling through time and space as the products of nonhuman perception and instinct. Laforgue even believed that the eye of impressionists evolved differently from other painters and was the most advanced in evolution (Laforgue 1986b, 330–331). The avant-gardist was considered physiologically divergent from others—as a creature that saw and behaved contrarily to most other human beings. The way in which Claude Monet saw and painted was viewed as wrong—it broke all the rules and traditions—but he arguably had created a way of seeing that was

different from the norm of his period.³ This expression of individuality resonates with us because it is a defiance of authority and the uplifting of a minor subject to greatness. It also implies the underlying possibility that *anyone can be an artist*.

To understand the radicalism of this act in France, where visual arts are inseparable from politics and society, one must also realize that historically a supreme ruler (whether royal or empirical) and his administration had the absolute and final say on what qualified as art, who could be trained and what could be displayed to the public. The Académie des beaux-arts ran the Salon until 1863 (Nord 2000, 16). Juries were composed of members who were either elected or chosen by the state. This institution, which dates back to 1667, was a vestige of the monarchical past that was antithetical to capitalist and bourgeois values. However, in the Second Empire, Louis-Napoléon made the rules for entry even stricter and more elitist, class-biased and discriminatory to all who were not Parisian males with institutional training. According to his administration's *règlement* of 1866, all works had to be exhibited in a gilded frame containing the place of birth of the artist, the name of his *maitres* and previous awards from Parisian exhibitions. It was thus fitting that during the bloody commune of 1871, an anarchist uprising following the end of Louis-Napoléon's regime, Gustave Courbet proclaimed the abolition of the Salon and its prizes (Hutton 1994, xvii). He was, consequently, banned when the Salon resumed in 1872. By the end of the nineteenth century, avant-garde painters had close personal relationships with known anarchists—famous friendships include neo-impressionist Paul Signac and anarchist Jean Grave. Signac's populist imagery painted in vibrant dots constructed harmony found in science and nature that was not apparent in social institutions which anarchists sought to abolish (Roslak 1991, 381).

Functioning outside of the primary social structure, the French avant-garde was synonymous with anarchy and animals—rebelling against authority and overturning humanistic practices. The Salon's insistence upon formal education based in tradition was becoming increasingly usurped by the naturalist value of instinct, common to all animals, as the root of creativity. As Giovanni Alois, a specialist on animals in contemporary art, argues in his critique of a traditional art manual, the belief that art is uniquely human “is a statement designed to stroke readers’ egos, suggesting their interest in something noble, like art, furthers their own nobility by implication” (Alois 2011, xviii). While Alois wrote this statement within the context of the proliferation of animal art in the last few

decades, the nineteenth-century artist-animal—with sharp instincts, attentive eyes and powers of communication with other forms of life—helped destroy this elitist association between art and nobility. Rather than being reserved for a select few, beauty and creativity were accessible to all.

Are animals, then, a mere metaphor for democratic consciousness in France and its cultural products in modernity? On the contrary, French art and literature during the second half of the nineteenth century often illustrate a reexamination of what it means to be a human versus an animal. It is this nebulousness between the formerly fixed concepts of human/animal and nature/culture where innovation and the imagination begin. From Honoré de Balzac's claim that his entire *Comédie humaine* (1842) series arose from "the comparison between humanity and animality" (Balzac 2014, 10) to Rachilde's declaration that "I barely belong to the human species and am much closer to a species of animal" (Rachilde 1926, 3), animals have been inextricably linked to creative transformations. Despite the abundance of literary animals that roam the pages of nineteenth-century French artistic fiction, animal studies have primarily focused on Anglophone literary and cultural productions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This book instead examines the ways in which French literature before the turn of the century can contribute to the burgeoning field of animal studies. Perhaps the key to understanding some of the most beloved genres of art—whose innovation surpasses traditional human(ist) ideals—lies in our connection to animals. However, animals' place within this literary and visual canon has, until now, been dismissed or ignored.

For example, in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, parallels are rarely drawn between the artist's affiliation with animals and the revolutionary art by Édouard Manet and Courbet, which inspired the novel. This phenomenon is surprising considering Zola explicitly states that the human animal is at the very heart of the naturalist project, whose aim is "to seek the animal/chercher ... la bête" (Zola 1953, 9) in its characters. In addition to characters that slip between human and "bête," the cat François, inspired by Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and the author's own love of cats, is even given a primary role in the novel. Perhaps, beneath this dismissal of non-human creatures lies the assumption that they cannot create works of art and do not belong in great literary works. However, as I will explain in this book, it is precisely this assumption that makes animals the perfect companion for both the impressionists and the artists of the Belle Époque, whose creative abilities too were denied and dismissed. Moreover, Zola's novel, which was disparaged by critics of the time, was an excellent shelter

for these stray creatures. Like the rhinoceros, monkey and elephant that stoically guard the Musée d'Orsay, brushed aside by tourists in their rush to view the now-iconic Manets and Monets, hordes of animals roamed nineteenth-century Parisian culture. Their roar can no longer be silenced, and their grandeur will now be seen.

1.2 HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

The origin of the nineteenth-century artist-animal perhaps began with the French Revolution, and the trope gained strength and multiplied after the publication of *The Origin of Species*. The post-Darwinian understanding of the species as evolving shattered Enlightenment constructs of the natural order as stagnant and stratified. Before the Revolution of 1789, the people of France were to obey one ruler, backed by the authority of a monotheistic God, who supposedly created all species of animals in a single day, over which man would rule. The number of species would neither increase nor decrease with time. As Swiss naturalist Charles Bonnet wrote in 1779, “No change. No alteration. Perfect identity/*Nul changement, nulle altération, identité parfaite*” (Bonnet 1779, 90). For Buffon, man, a servant of God, remains at the top of the hierarchy of being: “Man, made to worship the Creator, commands all the creatures, vessel of the Heavens, King of the Earth/*L'homme fait pour adorer le Créateur, commande à toutes les créatures, vassal du Ciel, Roi de la terre*” (Buffon 1853, 7).

The menagerie in the Old Regime would model this hierarchy; animals served to display the grandeur of the king and the glory of France. In the seventeenth century, Louis XIV held menageries in both Vincennes, where he would entertain visiting officials with bloody battles between creatures, and Versailles, which boasted an octagonal observation room (Robbins 2002, 37). It was fitting that in 1793 the French Revolutionaries transported the exotic animals from Versailles to the Jardin des Plantes in the city center, where they would become “free” for all citizens to enjoy. Opened in 1794, the menagerie was the first national zoo available to the public (Hancocks 2001, 35). As historian Louise Robbins writes, a handful of societal critics, Buffon included, considered wild creatures to be symbols of liberty in contrast to the enslaved animals that dwelled under a tyrannous rule (Robbins 2002, 6). Thus, the linking of animals to the common person in the nineteenth century, rather than the reign of the king or the aristocracy, represented the new shift in political authority. In the eighteenth century, artistic renderings of flora

and fauna (*la belle nature*) would adhere to preconceived guidelines of what nature ought to look like rather than what it actually looked like (*la nature pure*) (Daston and Galison 2007, viii). Dictated by the Académie des beaux-arts, the concept of *le Beau* was often as immutable as species, class and gender identity, seldom possessing untidy or multiple configurations, which would shift in the nineteenth century.

Before our discussion of the zoological fiction of the Second Empire, it may be fruitful to acknowledge its predecessors during the governance of King Louis-Philippe, the last Monarch in France, from 1830 to his abdication in 1848. As Eugen Weber details in *From Peasants to Frenchmen* (1976), France was a nation of peasants for most of the nineteenth century, with the majority of its citizens involved in agriculture in disconnected provinces. The country experienced much cultural conflict when Paris became a major metropolitan and industrial center. This shift helped create the artist as animal myth, a figure that was at once natural and urbane. Indeed, Barbizon artists who painted in the forests of Fontainebleau—and its cows, chickens and horses—served as intermediaries between rural and city life. This period also marks the beginning of the popularity of urban pets and the establishment of the Animal Protection Society (*Société protectrice des animaux*) in 1839, authorized by the government in 1846. According to historian Kathleen Kete, this society created an imposition of bourgeois behavior onto peasants and the working class (Kete 1995, 6), thus creating a divide between the well-kept pet confined to domestic interiors and the filthy beasts of the farm or gutter—a theme which we will revisit in the final chapter of this book in the context of the cat-woman myth. The tension between rural and metropolitan in the nineteenth century forced human subjects to redefine their position regarding other species, serving as a catalyst for revolutionary art and literature.

For example, influenced by debates regarding the possibility of evolution, the July Monarchy gave birth to the zoological writings of Balzac and Alphonse Toussenel as well as the illustrations of J.J. Grandville, all of which inserted animals into every faction of modernity. Beginning on February 15 of 1830, Georges Cuvier and Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire engaged in a series of debates on comparative anatomy in front of the Academy of Sciences. While Cuvier attempted to establish a taxonomical order to prove the fixity of the species, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire argued for a unity of composition among all species, which is now considered a precursor for evolutionary theory. Richard Somerset, a French literary scholar,

argues that these contradictory viewpoints encapsulated the ambivalent climate of the July Monarchy, which sparked the literary imagination. Cuvier's rigor indicated that the discipline of science was no longer a mere branch of philosophy, but rather a systematic and reproducible means of achieving objective knowledge. Realist fiction and later naturalist fiction attempted to approach its subjects in a similar objective manner. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's speculative reasoning and creative connections between unlikely beings inspired writers take imaginative leaps in their works (Somerset 2002, 83). It is this tension that we will explore in the first section of the book and the ways in which animals and natural science shaped literary and artistic breakthroughs.

Realist literature marked a departure from Romanticism, which often contained a sentimental narrator, in an exoticized location, at the center of the work. In applying biological science to the French social order, realist fiction refuses to treat human beings as above or separate from all other forms of life—a motif we will explore in *Manette Salomon* as the artist Coriolis shifts from an Orientalist painter to a realist painter of modern Paris. Animals are central to this genre. In his preface to the *Comédie humaine*, Balzac writes that “societal species” share parallels with zoological species. “For does not society modify Man, according to the conditions in which he lives and acts, into men as manifold as the species in Zoology? The differences between a soldier, an artisan, a man of business, [...] are as great, though not so easy to define, as those between the wolf, the lion, the ass, the crow, the shark, the seal, the sheep, etc.” (Balzac 2014, 10). Balzac applied Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's erroneous belief, based on Lamarck's ideas, that environmental factors produce variants in species to human beings. He thus argued that different environments create varieties in human professions. Animals thus became associated with capitalism during the July Monarchy. Biological diversity was compared to professional diversity, and with evolutionary theory came the promise of social mobility or decline. Balzac's ambition to inscribe humans within the animal kingdom would serve as a model for later nineteenth-century writers such as Zola to explain individual temperament and social inequality (Lyle 2008, 308). Realist and naturalist literature often depicted the battles of working-class individuals for scarce resources in the same way that animals fought for survival (Hurt and Wilkie 1997, 971–976). The history of French Realism illustrates the interconnectivity and inseparability between humans and animals in French fiction—explaining the core values of modern, capitalistic life as being shared by multiple species and integral to evolutionary processes (Fig. 1.2).



Fig. 1.2 J.J. Grandville. *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux*, 1841–1842. From left to right: Hetzel, Balzac and Grandville. Wikimedia Commons. United States Public Domain

The frenzied spirit of the Revolution of 1848 and hopes of social justice and equity were soon squelched by the authoritarian rule of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte or Napoléon III, nephew of Napoléon I, who seized the throne in 1852 after a coup d'état. If animals were associated with freedom and the imagination in the post-Revolutionary consciousness of nineteenth-century France, it is no coincidence that depictions of animals

in the Second Empire, including in *Manette Salomon* and *Thérèse Raquin*, took place within a cage. In this oppressive police state, government surveillance occurred even in cafés and nearly two-thirds were closed (Deluermoz 2012, 129). Ruling by public relations and demagogic, Louis-Napoléon reestablished censorship of images and made political satire practically impossible (Whidden 2014, 11–12). Jane Mayo Roos, an art historian, argues that in the beginning of the Second Empire the art world was a small-scale version of political life where all aspects were under the control of Louis-Napoléon’s administration, especially the Salon (Roos 1996, 2). The jury had rejected so many artists in 1863 that Louis-Napoléon created a Salon des refusés in which works that had been excluded, including Manet’s *Dejeuner sur l’herbe*, could be exhibited. Louis-Napoléon’s rule created a polemic between political authority and artistic authority—thus initiating the avant-garde, which represented the struggles of the common individual rather than the ideologies of the state. Animals took on a similar role. As Kete argues in her study of nineteenth-century petkeeping, domestic animals were associated with the culture of common citizens and the negotiation of values in the emerging bourgeois class identity (Kete 1995, 133). Thus, literary and visual animals reflect a shift in consciousness from adherence to absolute authority to embracing the creative spirit of the individual.

However, while the abundance of animals in homes in the 1860s mirrored domestic life, the profusion of animals in city zoos was a public display of societal imprisonment. The first section of this book explores the identification between artists and menagerie animals in the Jardin des Plantes—as caged creatures longing to be free. Scientists who played a pivotal role in enriching theories of evolutionary biology, such as former directors Buffon, Cuvier and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, developed many of their ideas from observing the plants and animals within this garden (Gregory 2003, 73). “The French nation saw the museum with its menagerie and garden as a symbol of the new free nation and the new scientific consciousness” (Kisling 2000, 89). Ironically, this independence was most often found within walled enclosures. Nearly all the animals died the year the Jardin opened and hundreds more died in the years to follow. Many foreign animals, such as flamingos, froze to death in the cold climate (Vezin 1990, 141). The connection between zoo life and the “exotic” is also certainly apparent in the history of the Jardin des Plantes. The menagerie prided itself on its Senegalese lion and two Algerian dromedaries acquired at the end of the eighteenth century as well as its orangutan from Sumatra (Laissus and Petter 1993, 81–121). In

addition, the garden possessed an elephant rotunda to commemorate the Napoleonic Empire and later an African aviary, created in 1888. For visitors to the menagerie, the captivity of such magnificent animals on French soil could symbolically demonstrate the power of the French over other nations. As we will see in *Manette Salomon*, debates on what constituted human versus nonhuman occurred alongside the dehumanization of foreigners, bohemians and other marginal figures.

Species disappearance in the Anthropocene era, as scientists Paul Crutzen and E.F. Stoermer have defined the geological period characterized by tremendous human impact and climate change, potentially dating from the invention of the steam engine in 1780, corresponded with animal captivity, growing colonial expansion and rising CO₂ levels due to industrialization. The decline of biodiversity in European city centers reinforced the colonialist fantasy of exotic wilderness where wild animals and indigenous people lived in harmony. This fantasy was exported to central Paris, Marseilles, Brussels, Antwerp, Hamburg, New York and other cities in the horrific and degrading form of human zoos, which often featured indigenous people in enclosures alongside animals, including zebras and elephants. For example, The Jardin d'Acclimatation in Paris hosted at least 30 ethnographic exhibitions from 1877 to 1931 including Nubians, Inuit, Somalis and Kanak. Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, leading researchers on human zoos, argued that the institutions served to construct society's image of an "other," establish a racial hierarchy in scientific theory and anthropological discourse and reinforce colonial power (Bancel et al. 2000, 16–17). This gruesome historical phenomenon is integral to discussions of animality and visuality in the nineteenth century. In equating indigenous people with animals, human zoos sought to uplift white Europeans as superior (and thus more "human") than all other nations. At the same time, these falsely constructed societies, often within the institution of a zoo or circus, could be seen as a wishful alternative to the dissatisfaction of modern European life. In this book, we will examine the ways in which the artist-animal myth, at times, both reinforced and unraveled these paradoxical desires.

While the Jardin des Plantes never held human zoos, its colonialist mission and mistreatment of animals is still largely absent from the art and literature of the time. In the literary and artistic imagination, the institution is a peaceful paradise. According to a poem by M.A. Dépasse, Jardin des Plantes "inspires the poet who looks for the calm of the woods/*vient inspirer le poète qui cherche le calme des bois*" (Vezin 1990, 5). The many artists who frequented the Jardin's menagerie, such as Henri Rousseau, Rose Bonheur, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Eugène Delacroix, depicted

the animals in lush, natural landscapes. By the end of the nineteenth century, Rousseau, in particular, “did not paint Paris as it was, as a city that was undergoing great changes, including the construction of the metro and the development of the department stores” (Ireson 2005, 36) but instead illustrated Paris as a vast jungle with monkeys swinging across the branches of orange trees. While in many ways the Jardin was a grim prison for animals, it served a crucial function as a temporary, “natural” escape from modern life, especially within Haussmannized Paris.

The importance of Louis-Napoléon’s restructuring Paris from 1853 to 1870, directed by prefect Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, cannot be overemphasized. These renovations were one of the most pivotal contributions to the artist-animal myth. Haussmann eradicated Paris’ medieval structure, with its dark, crowded alleyways replete with disease and created widened boulevards with north and south axes, a sewer system and numerous green spaces to allow better air quality (Sutcliffe 1996, 4). In 1860, Louis-Napoléon annexed the suburbs to Paris (Larbodiére 2012, 9). The city doubled in size, devouring forests in its wake (Forrest 1997, 11). As Paris transformed into a bustling and increasingly polluted city, wildlife became more and more removed from one’s daily existence (LaRocque 2012, 98). “Nature” became an entity outside of and separate from human existence, a chasm which citizens desperately sought to fill through visits to urban parks and menageries, both real and imaginary. As citizens lost contact with flora and fauna in their daily lives, art, literature and natural scientific texts began to serve similar function as public parks: to make animals and plants visible in daily life.

The profound interest in nonhuman species in naturalism occurred concurrently with the industrialization of major European cities. *The Origin of Species* included detailed observations gathered from his voyage on the HMS *Beagle* as well as his later findings, which served to help explain the diversity of life. Darwin concluded that each species had not been created independently, but rather had descended from other species (Darwin 2010, 1). Lamarck had proposed that different species had developed from a use or disuse of acquired characteristics which would help them adapt. In contrast, Darwin claimed that evolution was dependent on a struggle for existence, in which organisms competed for survival through a process of natural selection. The weaker ones would perish while the organisms with traits that enabled them to best survive and reproduce would pass them on to their offspring through sexual selection. He did not explicitly state that humankind had descended from apes, which he

later argued in *The Descent of Man* (1871). Darwin's insistence that species were neither unchanging, nor independently created, overturned creationist views. According to the evolutionary theorist, the beauty of the natural world was not created only for humans to admire because the earth contained aesthetic marvels before human existence. "Were the beautiful volute and cone shells of the Eocene epoch, and the gracefully sculptured ammonites of the Secondary period, created so that man might ages afterward admire them in his cabinet?" (Darwin 2010, 266).

Also radical for his time, from his studies on beehives to beaver dams, Darwin attempted to demonstrate that flora and fauna possess artistic faculties and aesthetic appreciation—thus dethroning the Artist from a noble ranking. He writes, "The same colors and the same sounds are admired by us and by many lower animals" (Darwin 2010, 267). Darwin also affirms that both man and animal can function by instinct or habit and that instinct is responsible for many creative drives, a notion that challenges the importance of elite education or training.

It has been remarked that a skillful workman, with fitting tools and measures, would find it very difficult to make cells of wax of the true form, though this is perfectly effected by a crowd of bees working in a dark hive. Grant whatever instincts you please, and it seems at first quite inconceivable how they can make all the necessary angles and planes, or even perceive when they are correctly made. But the difficulty is not nearly so great as it at first appears: all this beautiful work can be shown, I think, to follow from a few very simple instincts. (Darwin 2010, 402)

Darwin's description of beehives undermines the assumption that the work of man is superior to that of animals and that human reason is superior to instinct. According to Darwin, the precise, geometric hive is an intuitive creation that does not rely on foresight, planning or intellectual understanding.

Over two decades after *The Origin of Species*, Laforgue makes the comparison between Darwin's aesthetic and the avant-garde because many painters did not always work from previous sketches or drafts nor did they incorporate shading strategies to make their paintings seem more realistic (Laforgue 1986b, 331). He claims that the impressionist "paints nature as he sees it/*peindre naïvement comme il voit*" (Laforgue 1986b, 329). As Diane Kelder, an art historian, maintains, the impressionists rejected the idea that subjects had to be noble or enlightening to be of artistic value and instead developed techniques to capture the fleeting essence of nature

(Kelder 1980, 13). As supposedly adaptive creatures that rely on physical response, impressionists in these works of fiction are portrayed as artists that paint as intuitively as bees building hives. For the first time in the history of French art, animal behavior became an *exemple à imiter*.

Historians of science have concluded that the immediate publication of Darwin's work was less incendiary in France than it was in England. The work was not translated into French until 11 years after its initial publication, by Mademoiselle Clémence Royer, and Lamarck had been advocating a form of evolutionary theory since his *Floreal* lecture in 1800 (Gould 1977, 187). Darwin used abundant, detailed empirical evidence to formulate a plausible conclusion, which was convincing to some of the scientific community. In the May–June 1860 issue of *Revue Contemporaine*, Henri Montucci believed that “the truth of Darwin's system will become more manifest” (Montucci 1860, 165). This is one of the reasons why this book is divided into two parts. The first part will discuss works by Zola and the Goncourt brothers that are primarily influenced by Buffon and the debate between Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Cuvier, and display the emergent figure of the impressionist artist whose vision is caged by societal mandates. The second part examines the Decadent works of the Third Republic, after Darwin's publications of *The Descent of Man* and *The Expression of Emotions in Humans* (1872). In addition to Darwinism, impressionism had become a well-established movement in the changing social landscape of the Belle Époque.

In the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War and the bloody insurrection of the Commune led by socialist radicals, the Third Republic (1870–1940) was meant to be a provisional government to reinstate order to France. At the end of the nineteenth century, the literary blurring of species lines occurred at a time when debates about who deserves rights, liberties and social mobility were at the forefront. The Dreyfus Affair (1894–1906) illustrated a divided society as the French avant-garde, including Zola and Mirbeau, defended Captain Alfred Dreyfus from anti-Semitic accusations of treason. The colonial possession of Indochina, Polynesia and West Africa and the newly opened trade routes to Japan challenged cultural identities. Historian Arnaud-Dominique Houte argues that, for the most part, low-class workers, women, migrants and colonized people were forgotten by the establishment (Houte 2014, 9). However, the Jules Ferry Laws (1881–1882) did attempt to improve conditions by establishing free, secular education for all, including women. I elaborate upon this shift in my chapter on Rachilde, in which I discuss the proliferation of female artists and writers and the birth

of the “New Woman,” which occurred concurrently with the emergence of “cat-woman” as an urban figure. In the last two decades of the century, the figure of the artist-animal evolved from being a victim of institutional imprisonment to a marginal radical.

The *fin de siècle* artist-animal thrived at a time when the public began to see art as an avenue to critique political hegemony. In 1881, the French government had also officially withdrawn its sponsorship from the Salon, which was taken over by a group of artists, the Société des Artistes Français. A poll of artists, critics, writers and composers, conducted by the review *L’Ermitage* in 1894, illustrated that more than half were sympathetic to anarchist ideals (Hutton 1994, xxii). As cultural products from the Third Republic demonstrate a negotiation of what constitutes citizenship, the concept of “personhood” was often in flux. It is perhaps for this reason why the avant-garde, many of whom possessed leftist or even anarchistic leanings, preferred not to identify as a “person” at all, but rather as an animal.

This shift in attitude also corresponded to the breakthrough publications of Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* and *The Expressions of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, which explicitly detailed humans’ evolutionary connection to other species. These texts were both pivotal for Decadent literature, which delighted in man’s terror, rage and disgust, reactions that blurred species lines. This time period marks a shift away from an ambivalent view of both animals and the avant-garde arts, and one that embraces the artist-animal, even if it remains a minor figure. Just as Darwin’s theory undermined the elite status of the artist, it also shattered the image of man as a gentle, dignified creature. As *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* illustrated, humans, just like other animals, bare their teeth and scowl when enraged, and their hair stands up on the back of their neck when frightened (Darwin 1872, 12). During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, an unprecedented number of writers and artists, including J.K. Huysmans, Mirbeau, Jean Moréas, Rachilde, Odilon Rédon and Gustave Moreau, had been obsessed with the processes of destruction and decay (Weir 1995, xii).

For the Decadents, inspired by not only Darwin but also Benedict Augustin Morel’s degeneration theory by way of criminologist Cesare Lombroso and the anti-bohemian theorist Max Nordau, societal decline was often conflated with biological degeneration. This movement was radically influenced by the concept of atavism, the tendency for traits from earlier stages of evolution, such as gills and tails, to reappear in certain

individuals. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin called this process “the principle of reversion, by which long-lost dormant structures are called back into existence” (Darwin 1871, 124), which served as compelling evidence for the theory of evolution. Reversion is relevant to all of the texts discussed in this project from Zola onward, and Laforgue’s account of the “primitive” eye in particular, because it allows for the possibility that certain individuals (impressionists) may possess physical traits from earlier stages in their evolution—and that this phenomenon does not necessarily occur in all members of their species.

The avant-garde generally affirmed their own animal-like status as a sign of uniqueness. However, as we see as early as in the Goncourts’ *Manette Salomon*, which portrays marginal factions of society—including women, Jewish people, bohemians and other minorities—as being closer to animals than French men, degeneration theory can dangerously approach eugenics. In contrast, Dreyfusards Zola and Mirbeau argue that the theory of evolution is compatible with proletarian and anti-fascist ideology (Lyle 2008, 6; Michel and Nivet 1990, 17). The character Étienne Lantier ponders Darwin in relation to social class in *Germinal* (1885) by Zola, stating in the novel, “If one class had to be devoured, why shouldn’t it be the people, so full of life, continually renewed, who devoured the bourgeoisie, effete and worn out from their luxurious lives?” (Zola 2011, 472). Similarly, as Pierre Michel argues, Mirbeau, an anarchist, took the position of defending Darwinism while simultaneously denouncing Social Darwinism (Michel and Nivet 1990, 17) and economic inequality.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE MODERN ANIMAL—THE NINETEENTH CENTURY MEETS ANIMAL STUDIES?

The Artist is Animal is a close reading of nineteenth-century literary texts about animals within their own scientific and artistic context. This book in no way claims to be a comprehensive overview of contemporary animal theory nor the ideas of its forefathers—Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Numerous books have been written on that subject in the last few decades, and this monograph is not one of them. At the same time, *The Artist as Animal* may provoke us to consider the ways in which the current “animal turn” in academic criticism may or may not share similar undercurrents with nineteenth-century French avant-garde thought. How do contemporary humanistic studies of animals lend to new readings of

nineteenth-century French texts? In which ways does the field of animal studies either illuminate or unravel our understanding of the fluctuating concepts of humanity, animality, nature and creativity in modern France? This book aims to be an addition to excellent comprehensive studies on animals and French culture such as *French Thinking about Animals* (2015), edited by Louisa McKenzie and Stephanie Posthumus. Little criticism has focused on what Susan McHugh calls “visual, literary animals” within the scope of nineteenth-century French visual culture. *The Artist as Animal* seeks to rectify this omission.

Contemporary animal studies call into question the ways in which we read faunae in fiction and rejects narrow definitions of the human experience as being separate from other forms of life. No longer considered mere metaphors for human existence or reminders of anthropological superiority, animals are increasingly recognized for their own extraordinary means of functioning, communicating and creating. The texts analyzed in this book raise the question as to whether the ability to both appreciate and produce art, once perceived the ultimate sign of human uniqueness and superiority, could be shared with other species. Aloi argues within the context of contemporary animal art—whose incorporation of taxidermized bodies in the last few decades dramatically contrasts with nineteenth-century French painting—cultural products that blur species lines are highly subversive because they threaten our investment in being human (Aloi 2011, xix). This view of the creative act as a radical force that destabilizes the categories of human and nonhuman is often considered a hallmark of contemporary philosophy, which is integrated throughout this book to both buttress and take apart nineteenth-century narratives of animality. The writings of Derrida will thus help deconstruct the artist-animal myth and the binary oppositions that it may either reinforce or obfuscate, particularly in the more ambivalent texts of the Second Empire. Like Derrida, who stresses the inextricable union between animals and the arts, Deleuze and Guattari may illustrate the artist-animal’s liberating potential. However, *The Artist as Animal* will also highlight the specific differences between the nineteenth-century construction of animality—often as a romanticized and colonialist alternative to industrial capitalism and institutional confinement—and that of today.

Secondary criticism from a variety of related disciplines upholds this book’s central claim that the artist-animal is a defining trope of modernity: developments in evolutionary theory, industry and urbanism contributed to a shift in understanding of revolutionary art as being “animal” in

France, which both reinforced and destabilized humanist values. Through an engagement with John Berger's seminal essay "Why Look at Animals?" *The Artist as Animal in 19th-Century France* also seeks to tease out the seemingly paradoxical notion that the rise of this literary trope occurred simultaneously during the disappearance of real animals of this time. We are likely entering the age of the sixth mass extinction, which scientists have concluded is largely caused by humans, as 477 vertebrate species (mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish) have gone extinct between the years 1900 and 2015, up to 100 times higher than the rate of extinctions throughout time (Ceballos et al. 2015, np). This book focuses on the crucial issue of species disappearance in the Anthropocene era.

As the artist-animal is particularly part of an urban phenomenon, I turn to zoological studies (Nigel Rothfels, Steven Spotte, Randy Malamud) that critically assesses representations of practices of viewing animals within zoos, either historically or in literary representations, which are institutions of human dominance. At the same, gathering from literary and cultural scholars McHugh and Anat Pick, this book highlights the caring and compassionate friendships that occur between human and nonhuman species alike—illustrating the potential for mutual respect and understanding as an integral part of creative expression. Finally, as *The Artist as Animal* delves into the *fin de siècle*, a time which both women's and animal rights were in flux, the link between feminism and animal ethics (Josephine Donovan and Carol Adams) becomes of the utmost importance for understanding the artist-animal in the Third Republic as a subject whose identity vacillates.

In Laforgue's poem "At the Berlin Aquarium," the topic of the fourth chapter of this book, the narrator stands in front of a glass tank and stares at the crocodiles, pythons and starfish before him and reflects upon their blank stares, which he compares to that of enlightened sages. This nineteenth-century exchange—mediated by both glass and Orientalist projections—can be paired with Derrida's famous musings on appearing naked in front of his cat, even if as a direct point of contrast. In *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (2008), a posthumous publication of a ten-hour address on "the autobiographical animal" given at the 1997 Cerisy Conference and published posthumously in French in 2006, Derrida details this moment between his cat and himself as a source of a myriad of philosophical reflections. The age-old question of

“who am I?” cannot be answered without considering one’s place within the larger web of existence. Denying a logocentric perspective that places humans in a position of mastery, Derrida thus locates animals at the core of the autobiographical and artistic process. The philosopher surrounds himself with a “horde of animals” that populate his own works (Derrida 2008, 37). I inquire whether the figure of the artist-animal constitutes as part of a fluid “border crossing,” (Derrida 2008, 3) in Derridian terms, between human and animal or whether the trope reinforces the pseudo-concept of “animal” as an inferior other to “human” (Derrida 2008, 23). For Derrida, the “animal,” independent of species, is only a term [hence Derrida’s famous pun “*animot*,” containing the French *mot* or word] for that which is different, and, therefore, inferior to humankind, justifying horrific violence and cruelty.

Derrida compares the violence toward animals during the last two centuries to “the worst cases of genocide (there are also animal genocides: the number of species endangered because of man takes one’s breath away)” (Derrida 2008, 25). According to the philosopher, by uttering the term “the animal” to encompass all that is not human, rather than acknowledging the complex network of interaction of living and nonliving organisms, one confirms his or her involvement in “the war of the species” (Derrida 2008, 31). It is not a coincidence that the trope of the artist-animal in fiction arose during a rapid decline in the sizes of populations of actual endangered vertebrate species. According to researchers at the University of Texas Health Center at Houston, 25 percent of these species declined every ten years beginning in the 1890s, when industrialization was at its peak (“Rapid Population Decline among Vertebrates Began with Industrialization” 2016, np). The construction of the artist-animal motif in literature, which attempted to unify a subset of human beings with a nonexisting and all-encompassing other, was, in part, a means of compensating for the very real decimation of species diversity in the postindustrial era.

Derrida reveals that one solution to avoid using the expression “animal” is to employ the plural “des animaux” (*animals*) to discuss differences within multiple species or individuals while affirming fluid boundaries of identity. One animal does not represent the condition of *all* animals, just as Derrida emphasizes the differences between his particular cat and literary representations of felines from Baudelaire to Lewis Carroll (Derrida 2008, 6–9). Derrida’s philosophy helps illuminate this book’s chapters on Laforgue, who denies creative perception as unique to

humans, and Rachilde, whose self-proclaimed affinity with cats and were-wolves unravels gender and literary constraints. However, as I illustrate in my chapter on Laforgue, the nineteenth-century institution of the zoo or aquarium is a means of reinforcing human—and specifically Western—dominion over all other beings.

As a heuristic strategy, the term “animal” may be unavoidable at times in my particular book as well as the term “nature.” One could draw comparisons between animal studies and women’s studies regarding this issue, particularly Naomi Schor’s discussion of Luce Irigaray’s use of the word “*femme*”: “When Irigaray projects women as speaking a sexually marked language, a ‘parler femme,’ she is, I believe, ultimately less concerned with theorizing feminine specificity than with debunking the oppressive fiction of a universal subject” (Schor 1987, 51).⁴ At times, the word “animal” may be necessary to debunk or question the fiction that surrounds this term, to the best of our limited human abilities.

One key distinction between the nineteenth-century conception of animals and that of today is the insistence that nonhuman species share a singular condition that is directly opposed to human civilization. Let us return to Zola’s claim that his novelistic mission in *Thérèse Raquin* was to “seek the animal” within his loutish characters of Thérèse and Laurent (Zola 1953, 9). Zola’s view that beyond the surface of refined human beings dwells an “inner animal” waiting to claw itself free arose, in part, from Darwinian evolutionary theory, which argued that man descended from “lower animals.” In 1842, Balzac postulated that, based on evolutionary theories by Lamarck and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, “there is only one animal” (Balzac 2014, 10), referring to a unified structure of all animals, whose form supposedly transformed to adapt to its environment. In the 1860s, Zola, like Mirbeau after him, essentializes “the animal condition” as a fixed set of primitive drives common to many species (to kill, eat and copulate) in opposition to the artificial and hypocritical values of humankind. For naturalist and Decadent writers, the word “animal” thus implies the basic needs and functioning of the body, which are repressed by society. For example, in *Manette Salomon*, the Goncourt brothers write of an artist “The animal in him needed to be in green spaces/*La bête, chez lui, avait besoin de se mettre au vert*” (Goncourt 1996, 237). The word “animal” here implies a basic need to surround oneself with vegetation, which was becoming increasingly difficult to fulfill due to the explosive growth of Paris compared to the countryside. In *Manette Salomon*, we find various attempts, artificial as they may be, to reconcile this divide. On

the other, the use of the singular noun “the animal” does not encapsulate the infinite variety of species and individual beings, as articulated by Derrida. As Pick writes in her discussion of philosopher Simone Weil, “there is nothing specifically ‘animal’ about the susceptibility of mind and body alike to earthly forces” (Pick 2011, 4). The need for vegetation, clean water and air are shared among most eukaryotic species. Furthermore, as we will discuss in the second chapter, the term “bête” (meaning both beast and stupid) is highly problematic.

As readers in the twenty-first century, we must take a critical distance from the authors’ imagined “animal worlds” and “natural paradises,” which are illusory constructs of modernity. They often suggest that which is subject to man’s control and violence, as we will examine in a discussion of the Jardin des Plantes’ menagerie, which was a prison or death sentence for many creatures. Furthermore, vivisection, the live dissection of animals, was controversial but commonplace in nineteenth-century French laboratories. One proponent was scientist Claude Bernard, whose application of the scientific method to medicine influenced Zola (Kete 1995, 15). In “The Beast and the Sovereign” (2009), Derrida examines the curiosity to perform anatomical dissections (to see, to be able to, to know, to possess) as an insatiable hubris that is directly tied to the quest for human power and sovereignty (Krell 2013, 29), a key theme in the Second Empire.

At the same time, rather than embodying major structures of power, the dejected and supposedly degenerate artist-animal is more likely an example of a Deleuzian and Guattarian “schizoid revolutionary.” According to Deleuze and Guattari, this rebel can never be a majoritarian figure, but rather a nomad, a madman, an outcast or an animal—who, at least temporarily, circumvents the social structure (Deleuze and Guattari 1975b, 333). For the theorists, the arts open up radical possibilities. In his oft-cited study of Francis Bacon, whose paintings enshroud ghastly heads in swirls of red meat, Deleuze argues that these works of art express “the zone of indiscernibility between human and animal” (Deleuze 2002, 20). For the theorist, Bacon’s paintings shock the viewer on a visceral level—rattling the nerves, shattering false ideologies and rational thought and altering one’s perspective. Only the physical being remains. Animals are integral parts of revolutionary art by destroying stifling beliefs and institutions.

Nineteenth-century art, in particular, expresses this zone of indiscernibility. The painting of sensation, according to Deleuze, “shares a common vocabulary with Naturalism and Cézanne” (Deleuze 2002, 34). For Laforgue,

art is also a visceral and physical process. He writes that the artist's eye must experience a calamity, which shakes the physical eye free from cultural illusions. Similarly, according to Arnaud Bouaniche's study of Deleuze, art shocks the viewer, "shattering the framework of one's normal perception, leading to new ways of feeling/*brisant les cadres de sa perception habituelle, l'entraînant dans ces nouvelles manières de sentir*" (Bouaniche 2010, 208). Such rhetoric was used to explain the vision of the impressionist and postimpressionist painters, whose depictions of contemporary subjects in dabs, truncated in unorthodox angles, were products of physiological metamorphoses. Laforgue argues that through the evolutionary process, the eye develops new ways of seeing, which ruptures with the past. "Alone, and by its principle of evolution, it is founded to support no other general objective than: the new, the new and the indefinite new/*Seul, et de par son principe d'évolution, il est fondé à ne préconiser d'autre objectif en général que: du nouveau, du nouveau et indéfiniment du nouveau*" (Laforgue 1986b, 342). In *Manette Salomon*, described as a "creature" and not a "person," Anatole experiences a physical transformation due to which all of his senses are altered and he becomes one with all living beings: "It seems that the creature begins to dissolve into All of living creation/*il semble que la créature commence à se dissoudre dans le Tout vivant de la création*" (Goncourt 1996, 546). These metamorphoses, which alter the very fabric of the artists' genetic makeup, are examples of "becoming animal." However, the key difference is that for Deleuze and Guattari, this dynamic state of becoming has no fixed essence. The term "animal" for Deleuze and Guattari is synonymous with the term "metamorphosis," for animals are continuously transforming. "Everything in the animal is metamorphosis/*Tout dans l'animal est métamorphose*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1975a, 64). This idea could be applied to nineteenth-century society itself, which was in flux. This society might be labeled a "becoming-revolutionary," what Bouaniche defines as an "alliance between philosophy and the creative forces of one's time period, forces that point to new values, new manners of living and feeling/*alliance de la philosophie avec les forces créatrices de son époque, forces qui font signe vers de nouvelles valeurs, de nouvelles manières de vivre et de sentir*" (Bouaniche 2010, 34). However, can we really compare Bacon's screaming figures and mutilated carcasses with the fossil formations found within Paul Cézanne's *Mont Saint-Victoire*, streaked across the canvas in multicolored shards? Is it possible to argue that Rousseau's paintings of prowling tigers in tall grasses are liberating, when the animals were transported from French colonies and kept in the Paris menagerie?

The interdisciplinary field of zoological studies has been pivotal to the first section of this book, whose initial research took place in the archives of the Jardin des Plantes and its menagerie in Paris, featured in *Manette Salomon* and *Thérèse Raquin*. Historian Rothfels' discussion of the transition from the nineteenth-century menagerie, a cramped collection of curiosities, to the twentieth-century zoo, an artificial habitat that sought to protect species from the supposed dangers of the wild, will illuminate our reading of these two novels in their relation to art and institutional confinement (*Representing Animals* 2002, 216). Furthermore, Rothfels elucidates that one role of the biological park in the nineteenth century was to serve as a space of quite repose (Rothfels 2002, 207). *Manette Salomon* presents the illusion of the menagerie as a natural paradise, where the fictional bohemian artist Anatole Bazoché coexists in harmony with predators and prey, as an escape from the increasingly smoggy and crowded city of Paris. In reality, most of the animals were kept in small enclosures with metal bars and dirt floors, and often froze to death (Morris and Green 2006, 25). The tall maze of pines in the garden hides rapidly rising housing developments and industries.

To critique representations of zoos in art and literature (especially the works of the Goncourts and Zola), I turn to the scholarship of Malamud, who deconstructs the depiction of zoos as edifying institutions and protective sanctuaries that mask the horrors of human dominance (Malamud 2007, 127). My chapter on Laforgue examines the institution of aquaria, in particular, as a synthetically constructed means of viewing sea animals as vestiges of our pre-evolutionary past. A study of the ways in which we look at animals in captivity would, of course, not be complete without an examination of John Berger's seminal art historical essay "Why Look at Animals?" published in *About Looking* (1980). Berger argues that the zoo emerged during a period of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century, when animals disappeared from our immediate sphere of existence (Berger 1980, 3). For Akira Lippit, the perception of animals as being in a state of disappearance has catalyzed their central role in modern thought and artistic expression. Lippit argues that modernity itself can be defined by the vanishing of wildlife in our everyday lives and its reappearance in our cultural productions, such as technological media, literature and philosophy (Lippit 2000, 3). According to Berger, before the nineteenth century, animals offered humans "an unspeaking companionship," which was different from any human relationship. The fact that animals were both like and unlike humankind made animals essential to the creation

of both the metaphor and the visual arts (Berger 1980, 6–7). However, in the postindustrial age, animals are considered both “raw material” and “commodities,” reduced to isolated and marginalized units of production and consumption (Berger 1980, 13). Whereas actual animals disappeared from view, images of animals circulated *en masse* in the form of children’s toys, decorations and in painting, with zoo animals serving as the “origins” of these reproductions (Berger 1980, 22). Interestingly, according to Elizabeth Kolbert, author of *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014), it was not until the nineteenth century—primarily due to the discoveries of fossils of extinct species such as the mastodon and the research of scientist Georges Cuvier—that the concept of extinction existed (Plumer 2014, np). Berger describes the way in which the threat of extinction fundamentally altered Romantic painting: “The images are of animals *receding* into the wildness that only existed in the imagination” (Berger 1980, 17). The artist-animal myth surfaced at a time when animals became associated with the imagination because they, as living and breathing creatures, were no longer visible in one’s immediate environment. While this book focuses on the centrality of animals to creative transformations in France during the second half of the nineteenth century, Lippit and Berger specify that it was actually, paradoxically, the *absence* of real animals in daily life that inspired these cultural productions. The only solution was to dream of them, to tell stories about them or to visit a zoo and paint them, or, at least, imagine them free.

The industrial era of the nineteenth century witnessed a decline of biodiversity, which continues to rapidly decrease (Waters et al. 2016, 137). Today, the World Wild Life Federation estimates that the planet has lost half its wildlife (Carrington 2014, np). However, as McHugh, a scholar of twentieth- and twenty-first-century animal studies and English-language fiction, writes, literary narratives on shared animal life are all the more prevalent for understanding biopolitics and spurring social change during an age of mass extinctions (McHugh 2011, 15).

In *Animal Stories* (2011), McHugh examines the developments of literary animal agency in examples of cross-species companionship in a variety of media. These texts focus on shared life among species rather than a human-centered viewpoint, which cannot be separated from political and scientific shifts regarding the interdependence of humans and other life forms (2). In her fourth chapter, McHugh details the inseparability of animals from recent biotechnological development—ranging from pigs raised for agri-food, sheep for stem cell lines or “victimless”

tissue-cultured meat (McHugh 2011, 164–170) and as well as the companion animals that accompanied humans participating in such endeavors. While the works of fiction that McHugh analyzes were produced in very different contexts—including films and television examples—from the stories and poems discussed in this monograph, we can find similar examples of cross-species companionship during the industrial era in Paris. From Vermillon, the monkey companion of an artist in *Manette Salomon* to Laure’s cat-child Lion in *L’Animale*, the relationships among species in these works of fiction illustrate the shared life between humans and non-humans alike, in the nineteenth century as well as the twenty-first. However, in the case of Vermillon and Lion both companion animals meet tragic ends, reflecting the impossibility of wildlife to thrive in urban Paris in the nineteenth century.

In *Creaturally Poetics* (2011), Pick, a comparatist critic of film and literary studies, focuses on the vulnerability of nonhuman life as a basis of both revolutionary fictional form and ethical standards. The topics of vulnerability and radical creative form also bridge the fields of animal studies and women’s studies, the intersection of which I will cover in my final chapter on Rachilde. In her discussion of Marie Darrieussecq’s *Pig Tales* (1996), a French novel in which a woman transforms into a sow, Pick questions criticism of the novel, which traditionally points to animals as metaphors for female oppression and mistreatment in the twentieth century (Pick 2011, 81). Instead, Pick approaches *Pig Tales*, which plays on the idea of *écriture de cochon*, “pig writing” or the equivalent of chicken scratch in English, as an “animality” of the writing process that transcends one’s identity as a female author (Pick 2011, 81). Written over a century prior to *Pig Tales*, Rachilde’s *L’Animale* in some ways transcends the category of female writing by infusing feline and female to break conceptual and linguistic boundaries with its own specific historical context. This book, via the groundbreaking work of Josephine Donovan and Carol Adams, thus examines the link between animal theory, feminist theory and *écriture féminine* within the societal and political limitations of the Third Republic.

Despite these revolutionary examples, is it possible that the nineteenth-century wish to be one with other species merely masks capitalist, colonialist and sexist ideologies, environmental destruction and technological advancement? Embedded in this nineteenth-century obsession with “natural man,” surrounded by flora and fauna under clear skies and green fields—the very opposite of modern Paris—is systematized racism and colonial violence. Marie Lathers, a specialist in French aesthetics and women’s studies, has

offered a postcolonial critique of *Manette Salomon*, which examines the parallels between the novel's assimilation of foreign animals in the Paris menagerie and the integration of Manette, a Jewish female model, into a Parisian artist's household (Lathers 2001, 149).

The critical reader of these works of fiction must keep their historical and political contexts in mind and resist seduction. That said, I ask the reader to consider the possibility that these texts are revolutionary—that the artist's association with animals is a temporary liberation from oppressive social constructs and mandates as well as outdated modes of perception and expression. In my examination of these nineteenth-century literary works, I posit whether a nonanthropocentric reading is, in some ways, possible—not only of these texts but also as a general approach to literary critique. To accomplish such a task, we must suspend our belief, conscious or unconscious, that animals are synonymous with inferiority, creative impotence and human parody. We must also actually see the theiomorphs that dwell in these works of art and fictional narratives. How many of us have also noticed the veritable jungle not only outside, but within the Musée d'Orsay, as Emmanuelle Héran, a French art historian, has illustrated in *Le Zoo d'Orsay* (2008), replete with lions and giraffes, right in front of our eyes, or are we perhaps blinded by prejudices?

I ask, and I believe that these texts ask, that we examine the ways in which innovation—often visceral, subversive, baffling yet intuitive—defies the traditional “human” experience. However, this task is not always easy given the time frame. The belief that impressionists shared a common vision with animals is, of course, rooted in the colonialist fantasy of escape from the frantic, polluted city of industry. It is steeped in pseudoscience and conceived by the literary imagination. However, in some ways, this myth actually shatters illusions. It proposes the idea that cultural conditioning—the ways in which we have been taught to think, see, believe and behave—may at times be false and run counter to the physical functioning of the body and its relationship to the environment. Animals can thus paradoxically be understood as both emblems of captivity and sources of creative liberation in nineteenth-century French literary and artistic works.

1.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Part I: Behind Bars: Artists and Animals of the Second Empire

Chapter 2

In *Manette Salomon*, Edmond de Goncourt (1822–1896) and Jules de Goncourt (1830–1870) depict the Jardin des Plantes' menagerie as a uto-

pia where artists are able to experience a profound connection with animals, which enables them to see differently (Goncourt 1996, 413). This chapter critiques the fact that this interaction between artists and animals takes place within an urban zoo. Critical readings of *Manette Salomon* have not discussed the novel in terms of ambivalence and either condemn the authors' conservative biases or champion their elegy of nature.

As perhaps the first example of literary impressionism, *Manette Salomon*'s painting-like imagery serves a function similar to a public park. Lush greenery and bamboo fences block the smoggy city skyline and provide shelter for weary marginal artists. Through historical documents of the Jardin des Plantes coupled with close readings of the text, I also demonstrate how the novel depicts the avant-garde artist of the Second Empire as like a caged animal, whose revolutionary vision is both bound and protected by societal constraints.

In an era of urban development, those who did not neatly fit within the framework of the increasingly capitalistic city were relegated to its margins. With the absence of institutional support, both artists and animals fit within this category. The Goncourt brothers portray the bohemian artist of the nineteenth century as “that class of individuals whose existence is a problem, social condition is a myth, fortune is an enigma, who have no stable residence, no recognized retreat, who are located nowhere and whom one encounters everywhere” (Seigel 1999, 4). While this definition is supposed to be that of the avant-garde artist, it also could be ascribed to an animal in modernized society. Likewise, the animal-like protagonists of *Manette Salomon* and *Thérèse Raquin* are misfits. Whereas Anatole, a bohemian artist in the Goncourts' novel, finds comfort in the menagerie, for Zola's protagonists societal constraints are only escapable by death.

Chapter 3

My chapter on *Thérèse Raquin* by Emile Zola (1840–1902) analyzes the battle between two protagonists Camille and Laurent—one a bourgeois esthete and the other an artist-animal—as representative of the tension between conservative versus Darwinian views regarding the organic world. Furthermore, it is emblematic of the struggle of the human animal to survive in an urban environment. Whereas Camille *studies* beasts at the Jardin des Plantes and praises manicured gardens, the brutish painter Laurent *is* a beast. He conspires with Camille's wife Thérèse and viciously kills him. As Zola's third novel and a precursor to his 20-part *Le Rougon-Macquart* series (1871–1893), *Thérèse Raquin* is a manifesto for the naturalist movement. Zola's scientific literature sought to strip characters to their physical essence. The reevaluation of the human subject contributed

to a radical approach to literature—a quest to find “the beast” within man. While deconstructing Zola’s essentialist construct of “the inner animal” in humans (which ignores the varieties of individual species and beings), this chapter also argues that *Thérèse Raquin* may enhance the field of contemporary animal studies by linking animals and modern art.

As I will explain in the second chapter, the protagonists—Laurent as a gauche painter from the countryside and Thérèse as a child of an Algerian tribal woman—spring from the earth (“boue”). As animals trapped in the city full of coaches, crowds and tortured consciences, death becomes their only refuge. What remains is a groundbreaking aesthetic—predating the sublime horror of Francis Bacon—that seeks to reveal the commonality between humans and other species—revealing the nerves, organs and blood within us all behind the masks of civilization. Exposing the tension between somatic function and human cultivation as well as that between artistic tradition and originality, these two novels reveal the vacillating image of the artist-animal in the Second Empire.

Part II: The Decadent Animals of the Third Republic

Chapter 4

However, the motif of containment still exists in the poem “At the Berlin Aquarium,” by Laforgue (1860–1887), whose oeuvre is the subject of my third chapter. Laforgue’s poem and essay “Impressionism” differ from of *Manette Salomon* and *Thérèse Raquin* because they are more affirmative of the possibility of an avant-garde revolution in vision. The texts reinterpret Darwinian and Helmholtzian science to support this claim. According to the poet, the physical eye of the avant-garde artist can be liberated from the constraints of human thought and enter into a Nirvana-like oneness. In contrast, in Laforgue’s poem, this transcendental experience occurs within a city aquarium (Laforgue 1986a, 606). As a foundation for the artist as animal myth, Laforgue theorizes that the uneducated eyes of the impressionist have evolved in a different way from those of the academic painter, allowing him to see in a dynamic and naïve manner. Whereas academics see according to a theoretical perspective, the impressionist notes “tones and keys” (*tones et touches*) of various shades (Laforgue 1986b, 330).

The aquarium represents freedom for Laforgue because it is perceived as an escape from Western urban society (although it is indeed a part of this society). Rejecting traditional European art, Laforgue writes, “Our modern polychrome has nothing on that of the Extreme Orient/*Notre*

polychrome moderne n'a rien à voir avec celle de l'Extrême-Orient" (Laforgue 1988, 82). I thus also discuss the cultural interest in the Japanese paintings of the "Floating World" during the nineteenth century. Through an examination of aquatic literature of the period, I illustrate the ways in which aquariums represented a new role for art to dive into the very origins of the human experience. As a Decadent poet who believes liberation can occur within a glass enclosure, Laforgue's writings represent a bridge between the novels of the Goncourts and Zola and those of Mirbeau and Rachilde. Literal cages are primarily absent from *In the Sky* and *L'Animale*. In Rachilde's *La Panthère* (1894), a panther escapes from internment and mauls her captor's child. In Mirbeau's *Dingo* (1903), a dog feasts upon caged birds designated for the London Zoological Garden. These Decadent works thus privilege natural impulses over institutional confinement.

Chapter 5

In the Sky, by Mirbeau (1848–1917), is a tale of a docile and insecure writer's friendship with a devilish painter who degenerates into an inhuman creature. Written by an avid defender of revolutionary painters such as Claude Monet, Auguste Rodin and Vincent van Gogh, on whom *In the Sky* is based, the novella reveals the interdependent relationship between writing and painting as well as the close proximity between genius and animality. Whereas Georges, a writer, is compared to a fly whose work is in its larval stages, Lucien, a feverish painter who despises the Salon and academic tradition, is a like vicious spider that traps his subjects in his web. In my analysis of *In the Sky*, I argue that in its comparison between avant-gardists and nonhuman creatures, the novella affirms the power of animals as minor, creative entities. Fierce, small and despicable, the Decadent animals in Mirbeau's work desecrate cultural illusions and generate fear, disgust and marvel in the hearts of the rational. *In the Sky* illustrates that destruction and creation are simultaneous processes and that they are both integral to the artistic practices.

Lucien's philosophy of art as an organic process that evolves and transforms echoes Darwinian and Lamarckian beliefs. For Mirbeau, evolution produces the spontaneity of individual genius (Michel and Nivet 1993, 14) which transcends the rigid and authoritative structure of both artistic and political institutions. His work goes even further than that of the Goncourts, Zola and Laforgue because Mirbeau suggests that, like microorganisms that develop and evolve into more complex creatures, drops of paint on the

painter's canvas "become animated/*s'animent*" and evolve into a painting (Mirbeau 1989, 92). Just as Darwin diminishes the importance of both God and man in the scheme of biological evolution, Mirbeau diminishes the importance of the author or the painter in a creative work. A painting becomes an almost parallel "nature" that is alive and flowers or decays with the passing of time (Mirbeau 1990, 244).

Chapter 6

In an era obsessed with decay, one widespread fear during the *fin de siècle* was the threat of the decline of the family order due to women searching for fulfillment outside of the home. My final chapter is concerned with Rachilde (1860–1953), a Decadent female novelist and playwright. Despite her prolific literary career, publishing dozens of works such as *Monsieur Vénus* (1884) and *La Jongleuse* (1900), Rachilde remains fairly unknown. Her fiction is even more enigmatic because she herself claims to be against feminism despite strong female lead characters and themes of lewd female sexuality.

In my analysis of Rachilde's *L'Animale* (1893) and other works of fiction regarding cats, I examine the trope of the *félina-fatale* as emblematic of *fin de siècle* ambivalence. This chapter reveals the perceived parallels between avant-gardists, cats and "New Women," who were all often partially liberated and partially dependent. I discuss the newfound abundance of women in the arts, from impressionists Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot to the performance artists of the Chat Noir cabaret. I trace the beginning of the cat-woman myth, where women and cats were often relegated to marginal spaces like rooftops and gutters, with no clear place in urban society. A morphing creature that escapes social identity, Rachilde's figure of the cat-woman transcends the boundaries between gender and species.

In these texts, many of the protagonists die tragic deaths—Zola's character Laurent and Mirbeau's character Lucien share the real-life fate of van Gogh. Laure's untimely ending reveals that the perceived relationship between women and animals can be both empowering and devastating. It should be clear that while all of the works of fiction offer subversive discourse against the social institutions of their day, none of them overturn these institutions. From a Deleuzian and Guattarian perspective, the minor is a potent force that undermines established dogma. As Deleuze and Guattari write, minor or revolutionary literature "breaks the symbolic structure/*brise la structure symbolique*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1975a,

14), creating small fissures and ruptures but never overthrowing the establishment. *The Artist as Animal* leaves open the possibility that although these texts may, in some ways, replicate the oppressive structure of their society, they may also create fissures within that structure to create a novel aesthetic. In the novels of the Goncourts, Zola, Rachilde and Mirbeau, bohemian “brutes” beg in alleyways, befriend lions, monkeys, peacocks and cats, and starve in minuscule studios. However, many of these “failed” artists, these miserable creatures, were based on Manet, Monet and van Gogh, whose paintings of dogs, cats and turkeys now hang in the most prestigious museums in the world.

NOTES

1. Frémiet’s *Jeune éléphant pris au piège*, Rouillard’s *Cheval à la herse* and Jacquemart’s *Rhinocéros* stood outside the Palais du Trocadéro for the Exposition Universelle in 1878. They were brought to Orsay in 1986 (Pinget et al. 1986, 43).
2. “In the popular sphere, articles in newspapers, magazines and the family press and a rash of satires and caricatures brought the story to the French nation at large” (Kendall 2009, 293).
3. See the 2010 “Monet and Abstraction” exhibition at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza and the Fundación Madrid that highlights similarities between Monet and abstract painters such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko.
4. One primary difference between women’s studies and animal studies is that nonhuman species cannot speak for themselves, at least not in a way that would be acknowledged by academic criticism in a meaningful way (Weil 2012, *Thinking Animals* 4).

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PART I

Behind Bars: Artists and Animals
of the Second Empire



CHAPTER 2

A Caged Animal: The Avant-garde Artist in Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's *Manette Salomon*

Manette Salomon (1867) concludes with Anatole Bazache, a struggling bohemian artist who identifies with nonhuman species, finding tranquility and security as a zookeeper in the Jardin des Plantes. At the end of his first day on the job, Anatole locks a tiger in its cage, “enclosing the sun and the ferocious beasts in the cages of the menagerie where the red lions walk in the flame of the hour/*enfermant le soleil et les féroces dans ses cages, la ménagerie où le roux des lions marche dans la flamme de l'heure*” (Goncourt 1996, 547). This image is central to the novel for it suggests the need to contain and preserve wildlife both within the urban menagerie and within art and literature (Fig. 2.1). Edmond and Jules de Goncourt gather from their own encounters with contemporary painters, popular science reviews and guidebooks, and the writings of Buffon and the debate between Cuvier and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire to formulate their aesthetic theories. The Goncourts note in their journals, “After having read Buffon’s theory of generation all day long, we conclude that Science is the revolt against human ignorance/*Après avoir lu Buffon, toute la journée sur la génération: la Science, la révolte de l’ignorance humaine*” (Goncourt 1989, 200). *Manette Salomon* reflects the scientific and cultural fascination with animals during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and like the many *artistes animaliers* of their day the Goncourts depict nonhuman creatures as sources of aesthetic freedom.



Fig. 2.1 *Animal Artists at the Jardin des Plantes*. *L'Illustration*, 7 August 1902. Wikimedia Commons. United States Public Domain

In the novel, which announces the genre of literary impressionism (Crouzet 1996, 31), the authors imagine that the avant-garde artist has a biological affinity with animals. This relationship is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, the avant-gardist may have more creative insight than the traditional artist. On the other, this creative freedom impedes him from assimilating into society. *Manette Salomon* constructs the narrative that the innovative artist in the mid-nineteenth century is like an animal in the menagerie of the Jardin des Plantes. He is portrayed as an exotic creature which functions differently from other human beings, but whose freedom is caged within a social institution. In this chapter, I argue that this artistic novel serves an analogous role to the urban zoo, for it creates the illusion of harmony with a beautiful, untainted paradise within a modern urban setting. The depiction of the vanguard artist as a caged animal thus constitutes a significant narrative of modernity—particularly during the authoritative regime of the Second Empire and the ambivalent scientific climate regarding evolution. Artist-animals express longing for creative emancipation within the confines of society.

This study impacts the fields of nineteenth-century literature, art and animal studies while also challenging the assumption found in criticism of the novel that *Manette Salomon* portrays animals—especially monkeys—as inferior, mimetic copies of human beings. This view is anthropocentric to its very core and fails to recognize the independence of species from human beings. Goncourt scholars R.B. Grant and Jean-Louis Cabanès discuss animals in terms of the decline and impotence of the artist. In contrast, I assert that in the novel animals are an integral part of creative breakthroughs. As discussed in the introduction, the focus on the common individual rather than a historical figure or head of state was a radical act in the Second Empire because it undermined the political authority of Louis-Napoleon's regime. This chapter investigates the ways in which animals were coded as both inspiring and threatening in *Manette Salomon*—simultaneously synonymous with genius and marginalization.

Throughout the novel, a young band of artists, including Anatole Bazoche and his friend Naz de Coriolis, an Orientalist painter, often frequent the Jardin des Plantes to paint the animals in its menagerie. They also migrate between their teacher Langibout's sinister art studio in Paris and the artist Crescent's farm in the Barbizon forest to develop their unique rendering of modernity. Based on Alexandre Pouthier, a marginal artist who painted animals and who knew the authors, Anatole demonstrates great artistic potential but lacks the drive or the discipline to execute it and instead acts comical and silly. Anatole feeds off the relationship between Coriolis and Manette, Coriolis' model-muse-turned-wife. Coriolis and Manette's destructive marriage drives Coriolis to abandon both Orientalism and Manette. While Coriolis searches for beauty in urbane Paris rather than distant lands, Anatole retreats to the Jardin des Plantes. In *Bohemian Paris*, Jerrold Seigel labeled the novel “anti-Bohemian and anti-Semitic” (Seigel 1999, 172). Seigel argues that Anatole “does not experience the need for a separate life, or his own private life, a man who by taste and by instinct attaches his existence to the instinct of others by a kind of natural parasitism” (Seigel 1999, 172). The words “parasitism” and “instinct” reinforce the concept of the artist as an opportunistic creature whose existence drains the lifeblood of hardworking, middle-class citizens who are trying to contribute to society. In Manette's case, the beautiful Jewish model's supposedly “animalistic” exterior reflects her sexualized, yet castrating, personality. The authors write, “It seemed to Coriolis that she recoiled in front of his offers, like a fine and nervous animal, with

instincts free and running, that did not want to enter into her beautiful cage/*Il semblait à Coriolis la voir reculer devant ses offres, ainsi qu'un fin et nerveux animal, d'instincts libres et courants, qui ne voudrait pas entrer dans une belle cage*" (Goncourt 1996, 283). Because Coriolis is a painter and Manette is his model, his attempt to "capture" her image onto canvas is like capturing a wild, resistive *fauve* in a cage. In fact, there are several impressionist paintings in which women appear to be in cages, such as Manet's *The Balcony* (1868–1869), which depicts Berthe Morisot in a cage-like balcony. Manet's *The Railway* (1873) features a dog, a little girl and her governess behind the iron bars of a fence.

The authors' anti-Semitic, misogynistic and colonialist prejudices found within the novel reveal both the simultaneous attraction to, yet fear of, the foreign or exotic. In her post-colonial critique of the novel, Lathers focuses on the ways in which the characters in the book have been "domesticated," similar to foreign animals that were brought into France and put on public display. The critic notes the influence of descriptive guides of the Jardin des Plantes, such as Pierre Boitard's *The Jardin des plantes: Description of mores of mammals in the menagerie and the Natural History Museum* (1842). In addition, Lathers has connected the rhetoric of the novel, particularly the use of the verbs "to acclimate," "to naturalize," "to tame" and "to domesticate" (Lathers 2001, 150), to that within *Acclimation and domestication of useful animals* (1849) by Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, son of Etienne and director of the Jardin des Plantes' menagerie and founder of the Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimation (1854). As the Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimation contained human zoos, where indigenous people were placed alongside animals, Lathers illustrates the connection between natural historical and colonialist discourse.

One of the focuses of this particular study is the way in which the novel, as a prime example of French artistic literature, artificially constructs the concept of the "natural," and "natural vision" in particular, through the creation of the myth of the artist-animal. "Natural" can be defined as "that which belongs to nature, that which is not the product of human practice/*qui appartient à la nature; qui n'est pas le produit d'une pratique humaine*" (Imbs 1971). This definition is, of course, problematic because it assumes that humans are separate from nature and human creations are unnatural. In the novel, the artist functions as an intermediary between the natural and the urban worlds. He observes animals at the Jardin des Plantes and in the Barbizon forest and "reports" the animals' physical characteristics and behavior to an urbane public. The artist's role as a reporter or an

observer parallels the Goncourt brothers' own role in nineteenth-century society (Fitzmaurice-Kelly 1988, xxviii). The Goncourt brothers' journals provide detailed descriptions of their contemporaries including Victor Hugo, Guy de Maupassant, Edgar Degas and Auguste Rodin, and are considered key sources for nineteenth-century French scholars. However, few studies have examined the relationship between artists and animals in the Goncourts' works.

2.1 CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF THE VISUAL, LITERARY ANIMAL

In recent years, animal theorists have produced groundbreaking research concerning the intersection of animals, literature and the visual arts. The urban menagerie and botanical gardens were means for modern city dwellers to experience a connection to flora and fauna that they could no longer encounter in daily life. From the beginning of the Industrial Revolution to today, animal art serves a similar purpose as the zoological park because it makes animals visible once again. Berger and Lippit have both argued that modern cultural products preserve the image of vanishing animals (Lippit 2000, 20). Berger claims that, similarly, "public zoos came into existence at the beginning of a period which was to see the disappearance of animals from daily life" (Berger 1980, 21), a phenomenon that fundamentally altered our practices of looking. Cages now frame each animal that visitors view. "They proceed from cage to cage, not unlike visitors in an art gallery who stop in front of one painting, and then move on to the next or the one after next" (Berger 1980, 24). Stripped of their habitat, these live beings are viewed like inanimate objects for public consumption.

In his discussion of the visual representation of caged animals within literature, Malamud claims that zoos provide incredible insight into humanity's "interpreted world" of animals, which is anthropocentric and hegemonic to the very core (Malamud 2007, 2). While zoos claim to be edifying cultural institutions akin to museums, Malamud argues that they in fact threaten our cultural sensibilities. Zoos attempt to convince human beings of their superiority and have little regard for the rights and needs of the animals (2007, 2–7). The Goncourt brothers' depiction of the artist zookeeper in *Manette Salomon* differs dramatically from Malamud's interpretation of Franz Kafka's caged artist in *The Hunger Artist*. According to Malamud, the artist is despondent and culturally impotent in his cage, which the critic argues parallels the conditions of caged animals in zoos

(Malamud 2007, 127). In contrast, the Goncourts espouse the conservationist claim that “caging” or situating animals (as well as artists) within an institutional framework is a way of protecting them from harm and thus paradoxically providing them with more freedom.

Although Pick disavows the belief that zoos serve to protect animals, her understanding of vulnerability as a basis of both radical aesthetics and ethics—inspired by the somatic revelations of philosopher Simone Weil—may be useful in interpreting *Manette Salomon* within its own cultural and historical context. Critiquing species discourse within cultural productions from Holocaust literature by Primo Levi to Werner Herzog’s film *Grizzly Man*, Pick underscores the moral value and need for compassion for all sentient beings (Pick 2011). The critic also emphasizes the recognition of the potential inhumanity of humans as well as the humanities. While the Goncourts often disdain, dismiss and mock marginalized figures, the authors also at times regard animals with remarkable compassion. For example, *Manette Salomon* details the agonizing death of Vermillon, Coriolis’ monkey and Anatole’s dear friend. Vermillon expresses suffering on his face, “looking like a little sick person, approached the man who pitied him, his suffering seeming human rather than animal/*en faisaient comme un petit malade approché tout près de l’homme de sa pitié par cet air de souffrance humaine qu’à la souffrance des animaux*” (Goncourt 1996, 403). The primate’s small body experiences painful shakes and his fists convulse. The artists relate these movements to human beings in tremendous pain. They believe Vermillon to be communicated the message: “My God! I suffer so!/*Mon Dieu! Que je souffre!*” (Goncourt 1996, 122). The Goncourt brothers used their observations of a dying monkey at the Jardin des Plantes in order to accurately describe Vermillon’s distress (Vallès 1867, 5).

In an interview with Georges Docquois, Edmond de Goncourt said that his brother had a “goût de singe” and made watercolor paintings of the monkey Cocoli in the Jardin des Plantes (Docquois 1895, 27). Edmond said that when he and his brother watched the monkey violently die of tuberculosis, it displayed “the agony of a monkey that is completely human, like a child who was dying/*l’agonie du singe est tout humaine comme un enfant qui mourrait*” (Docquois 1895, 27). In the novel, Vermillon’s suffering is apparent in his eyes (“his eyes grew large with suffering/*ses yeux agrandis de souffrance*”) (Goncourt 1996, 403), which reveals its emotional attachments and feelings of loneliness and misery.¹ The artist watches him with a palette in hand. The novel emphasizes the beauty of this fragile, dying creature whose suffering parallels that of mankind. Entirely different

from the other idealized representations of animals in the novel, this scene may incite empathy as well as awareness of the realities of animal suffering and death. According to Georges Rodenbach, suffering could be an integral part of being a creative artist because he is “too exquisite” who experiences life in a highly nuanced manner. The critic argues that the artist’s extreme sensitivity, and ability to feel the suffering of another living creature as if it were his own, distances him from the rest of humanity and makes him closer to animals (Rodenbach 1896, 559).² The artist’s connection to other creatures thus evokes this question posed by Pick, within the context of the metamorphic literature of Darrieussecq in the 1990s: “Do not literature, the arts, and ‘the humanities’ at large reflect the incomplete becoming—the struggle of the human to assume and inhabit a definite form?” (Pick 2011, 83). While Pick and the Goncourts are writing in very different historical contexts, they both approach literature and the arts from the perspective of unraveling the human subject. The difference is that in *Manette Salomon*, the between-species artist Anatole becomes reintegrated into the social order in the form of a zookeeper.

In contrast, *Manette Salomon*’s inclusion of the monkey Vermillon as a character in the novel who experiences the same emotions, connections and tragic death as any human character exemplifies the possibilities of fiction to explore the value of nonhuman life. McHugh spotlights the ways in which fictional representations of animals allow us to consider the interconnectedness between humans and other forms of life, which bring issues of ethics and social change to the forefront (McHugh 2011, 19). In a contemporary context, the field of visual and literary animal studies reflects a shift in perception that animals are no longer mere extensions of human subjects but merit agency in their own right and are viewed as integral to human functioning (McHugh 2011, 3). This approach undercuts disciplinary boundaries and integrates biology, the social sciences, literature and aesthetics (McHugh 2011, 20). Although *Manette Salomon* was produced in a very different era than the texts which McHugh analyzes, this chapter illustrates the ways in which the traditionally separated contexts of avant-garde aesthetics and natural history became intricately interrelated in the figure of the artist-animal in nineteenth-century France. Critical readings of the novel should challenge its idealized representation of the menagerie as celestial, which attempts to mask its role as an urban institution that has little regard for animal welfare. In addition, in light of Derrida’s *The Animal that Therefore I am*, contemporary readers should also be wary of the novel’s attempts to essentialize animal nature as that

which is separate from human, which is ultimately the root cause of imprisonment and violence toward other creatures (Derrida 2008, 34). However, *Manette Salomon* should also be regarded as revolutionary in that it considers artistic beauty outside of the narrow definition of “human” and illustrates the creative potential of animals.

2.2 THE SIMIAN ARTIST

Anatole is particularly connected to animals with his marginal behavior, comedic temperament and lack of academic motivation. Langibout, the artist’s teacher, calls Anatole a “little animal/*petit animal*” (Goncourt 1996, 149) and tells him, “Little pig, you don’t work/*Petit cochon, vous ne travaillez pas*” (Goncourt 1996, 119). The Goncourt brothers describe Anatole as being born with “the malice of a monkey,” who, as a child, had jumped around like a toad and yelled: “Voila! The Revolution is starting!/*V’là la révolution qui commence*” (Goncourt 1996, 103).

Lacking diligence and seriousness, Anatole exhibits monkey-like behavior, and he is unable to accomplish much more than creating mischief. On the other hand, Anatole’s disregard for social praxes could make him a revolutionary figure, whose free spirit adds creative energy to the otherwise dull artists’ studio. Nicknamed “The Joke,” Anatole represents modern disillusionment, becoming “the farcical credo of skepticism, the Parisian revolt of dissolution, the light and childlike form of blasphemy/*le Credo farce du scepticisme, la révolte parisienne de la désillusion, la formule légère et gamine de blasphème*” (Goncourt 1996, 108). While the authors were suspicious of cultural rebellion, the novel assigns some insurgent power to the minor figures of animals and bohemians and the strong bond they share.

Anatole’s very close relationship with his pet monkey Vermillon reinforces the artist’s connection to animals. “It seemed that the monkey felt linked to this boy, whose nature was so similar, so supple, so elastic, with such a mobile physiognomy: he found in him a bit of his own race; it was a man, but almost a man of his own family/*Il semblait que le singe se sentait comme rapproché par un voisinage de nature de ce garçon si souple, si élastique, à la physionomie si mobile; il retrouvait en lui en peu sa race; c’était bien un homme, mais presque un homme de sa famille*” (Goncourt 1996, 229).

Anatole is almost a monkey-man: one who fits within both the categories of human and nonhuman. This concept was popular in the scientific climate of the time. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’s dissection of chimpanzees

found that they were much closer to human beings than other primates such as lemurs (Lewis 1911, 177). Although Buffon believed that apes did not have a soul like humans, he discussed the remarkable physical similarities between humans and monkeys, describing the orangutan as having a body more similar to man than other apes (Butler 1879, 176).

As the two spend time together, Anatole adopts the monkey-like characteristics and behaviors of Vermillon. “The two friends faded into each other. If Vermillon made Anatole more monkey-like, Anatole made Vermillon more artistic. Next to him, Vermillon developed a taste for painting/*Les deux amis avaient déteint l'un sur l'autre. Si Vermillon avait donné le singe à Anatole, Anatole avait donné de l'artiste à Vermillon. Vermillon avait contracté, à côté de lui, le goût de la peinture*” (Goncourt 1996, 229). The chiasmus in this passage and the expression “faded into each other” suggest a symbiotic relationship between the artist and his monkey. The Goncourts admired Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps’ paintings of monkeys performing human activities, particularly *The Monkey Painter* (1833) (Champeau 2000, 228). During Vermillon’s own artistic exploration, the monkey eats tubes of paint, and he rips up sheets of paper in rage (Goncourt 1996, 237). Lathers, Cabanès and Grant read this scene between the painter and the monkey as a parody or shallow imitation of the naturalist artist who seeks to copy nature.³ Vermillon’s destruction also indicates the artistic limitations of animals. Grant writes that Anatole’s artistic downfall is revealed “above all through his alter ego, his pet monkey Vermillon [...] In one significant scene, Vermillon even tries to paint, but of course accomplishes nothing” (Grant 1972, 89). The words “of course” imply the critic’s assumption that animals do not have any creative faculties. The sentence also discounts the fact that Vermillon is able to draw something, circles “*toujours des ronds*,” even though his talent is very limited (Goncourt 1996, 231).

I assert that it is necessary to consider the historical importance of theriomorphs in scientific and cultural thought at this time, which sought to bridge the gap between humans and other species, particularly in the arts. “All of a sudden, in the art studio, bonded, tied, one species in a flying race between man and beast, a stampede, an uproar, cries, laughs, jumps, a furious fight/*Tout à coup, dans l'atelier, des bonds, des élancements, une espèce de course volante entre l'homme et bête, un bousculement, un culbutis, un tapage, des cris, des rires, des sauts, une lutte furieuse*” (Goncourt 1996, 229). While Vermillon and Anatole are two separate individuals of two different species who both laugh and cry, they combine

in a tornado-like flurry to become one species. However, it is in the artist's studio, through the artificial lens of painting, that this union between man and monkey takes place.

Thus, the novel's focus on "nature," whether it be through green, urban spaces such as the Jardin des Plantes, through the Fontainebleau forest outside of Paris or through animal-like characters such as Anatole, Manette or the Barbizon artist Crescent, creates a sort of release valve from daily, urban life. The authors construct the narrative that the Jardin des Plantes, in particular, is a "divine land/*une terre divine*" (Goncourt 1996, 447). In contrast, according to most historical documentation, the animals in the garden's menagerie were actually kept in enclosed spaces in squalid, miserable conditions. Most of the animals were kept behind metal bars with nothing but dirt inside their small cages. They were deprived of vegetation, and snakes huddled under used hospital blankets to keep warm (Ireson 2005, 52).

Paradoxically, both the Goncourt brothers and artists such as Delacroix, Bonheur and Rousseau create the illusion that the animals in the Jardin des Plantes thrive in a lush, natural environment that is separate from urban Paris. However, the fact that animals lived in cages and slept under hospital blankets reinforces the Jardin's status as a civil institution such as a jail or a hospital. Thus, the artistic obsession with animals was part of an urban aesthetic. In naturalizing the urbane, the novel justifies and reinforces the emerging urban and industrial society of mid-nineteenth-century Europe and its colonial and hegemonic structure. On the one hand, *Manette Salomon* expresses nostalgia for a mythical Eden-like space in which humans and animals lived in harmony. On the other, the novel is an expression of modernity and is perhaps a precursor to modern art.

As the Goncourt brothers were not themselves scientists, biological findings served as a basis for developing a pseudoscientific explanation for artistic creativity while also sparking the authors' literary imagination. While the Goncourt brothers do not mention Darwin in their journals until after *Manette Salomon* was written, the authors do refer to the debate on transformation between Cuvier and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire in their discussion of Paul Gavarni, an illustrator and scientist who believed that the two disciplines were interdependent. In addition to creating illustrations of the two Goncourt brothers among other human and nonhuman subjects, Gavarni is the author of *Classification naturelle des sciences*, in which he outlines a framework for the integration of multiple disciplines from anatomy to fine arts. Gavarni writes, "Science needs art like art needs

science/*La science a besoin de l'art comme l'art a besoin de la science*" (Gavarni 1903, 72). At this time in France, the phenomenon of science fiction was also developing into a literary genre: "Its materials, themes and narrative formats derived from the varying sort of *merveilleux*, utopias, imaginary voyages and texts of scientific popularization" (Crosland 2001, 315). *Manette Salomon* is an amalgamation of personal interpretations of scientific theories that suggest man's biological connection to animals.

Edmond de Goncourt had certainly read Darwin in the 1870s and 1880s, and in his novel *La Faustin* (1882), the character Lillette is a translator of Darwin. However, in the literary sphere of the 1860s, there is no evidence to suggest that Darwin directly influenced *Manette Salomon*. Rather, it was earlier natural scientists, such as Buffon, who were the direct influence on the Goncourts. Scholars have noted the authors' misreading of Buffon in the Goncourts' works. For example, in *Manette Salomon* the authors described Vermillon, the pet rhesus macaque, as the same monkey that Buffon had called a Memnon (Goncourt 1996, 251). However, Lathers points out that the rhesus is not the same breed as the Memnon (Lathers 2001, 56). The Goncourts misquote Buffon multiple times in their journals, attempting to use Buffon's discourse on style to reinforce the concept of *l'art pour l'art*: "The manner in which truth is uttered is much more useful to humanity than the actual truth/*La manière dont une vérité est énoncée est plus utile à l'humanité même que cette vérité*" (1989, I 518). The Goncourt brothers do not directly follow Buffon's and other scientists' ideas to the letter. Instead, the authors incorporate their own personal understanding of biological science in a nineteenth-century literary and artistic context to both disassemble and reinforce the human subject.

For example, in their discussion of the 1830 evolutionary debates and their link to Gavarni in their journal entry dated December 28, 1862, the authors describe intense sexual desire, a shared trait between humans and animals. "And all of a sudden, you feel you have become an animal. There is a brute in your being. It's the transfusion of brute to man/*Et tout à coup, vous vous sentez devenu un animal. Il y a une brute dans votre être. C'est la transfusion de la brute dans l'homme*" (Goncourt 1989, 910). As we will discover in Zola's works in the next chapter, the Goncourts describe the naturalist vision of humanity as containing an "animal essence" within a human body that vacillates between these two categories of being. Derrida negates this imagined concept, arguing in the twentieth-century context of Lacan's mirror stage—the passage into human subjecthood and individual identity—that the sexualization of "the animal" apart

from the rational self signifies its deprivation of the imagination, language and rights (Derrida 2008, 120). Furthermore, we should be wary of the singular article paired with the derogatory term “*la brute*” and “*l’homme*,” which forces a myriad of creatures into these binary categories that imply dominance of the latter over the former. While simultaneously ascribing sexuality to that which is the so-called “animal,” this passage also strangely articulates a point of slippage between human and nonhuman.

This revolutionary idea stems from Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’s notion of “Unity of organic composition,” which is considered a precursor to evolution (Saint-Hilaire 1834, 24). Contrary to Cuvier, the scientist writes that when classifying species, scientists should resist comparing differences in their parts, but rather focus on common function, including locomotion and sensory organs (Saint-Hilaire 1834, 6). In doing so, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire indicates a common ancestry, even if it violates rules of science that insist upon species as precisely defined and fixed: “Our unknown X will necessarily be A or B, the one excluding the other, one of the two without the slightest hesitation/*Et notre inconnu x sera nécessairement a ou b, l’un à l’exclusion de l’autre, l’un des deux sans la moindre hésitation*” (Saint-Hilaire 1834, 7). Deleuze and Guattari rephrase Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’s statement in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “Natural history can only think in terms of relationships, between A and B, not in terms of production, from A to X/*L’histoire naturelle ne peut penser qu’en termes de rapports, entre A et B, mais non pas en termes de production, de A à X*” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 286). The theorists highlight the groundbreaking nature of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’s conclusion given natural history’s inclination to place every being in a clearly defined category. In this sense, the Goncourts’ rudimentary (if not completely backward today) concept of “the brute in man” could be a means of X being both A and B simultaneously.

Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire highlights the role that observation and creative expression play in expanding science away from dogmatic thinking. In contrast to scientific doctrine, which operates on the principle of exclusion, the naturalist states, “I have shaped these works using names by which the beauty of expression was rendered necessary by the novelty of objects to make known/*J’ai donné une forme à ces travaux par des appellations dont la nouveauté d’expression était rendue nécessaire par la nouveauté des objets à faire connaître*” (Saint-Hilaire 1834, 7). The innovative concept that one organism could evolve from another led to a completely new paradigm, engendering novel ways of conceiving and creating. This is what Deleuze and Guattari mean by conceiving biology “in terms of

production, from A to X.” This novelty of expression, which is central to Deleuze and Guattari’s aesthetic philosophy, is also crucial to that of the Goncourts. Interestingly, for the Goncourts, this nebulous area between species is written within the context of discussing Gavarni, who is for them both an artist-scientist and a human animal.

The trope of the artist-animal not only encapsulates tensions in defining the human subject in the industrial area as being part modern, part animal but also tensions in the understanding of man’s evolutionary place in the chain of being. For the Goncourts, this revolutionary potential is tempered by bourgeois ideology. They write:

There are two men in Gavarni. One curious man with the grandest questions, for whom, like for Goethe, the 1830 Revolution would be a small event after Cuvier’s opinion at the Academy [...] Then you have the other Gavarni, fairly straight and narrow, nourished from the little tastes of the Restoration, liking fables and songs./

Il y a deux hommes dans Gavarni. Un homme curieux de plus grandes questions, pour qui, comme pour Goethe, la révolution de 1830 serait un petit événement auprès d’une opinion de Cuvier à l’Académie [...] Puis vous avez un autre Gavarni, assez étroit d’esprit, nourri des petits goûts de la Restauration, aimant la fable, la chanson. (Goncourt 1989, 910)

The Goncourt brothers present a dualistic view of the artist—either an animal trapped in the body of a man or two men trapped in the same body. While one being is fascinated with great questions about the place of humanity and one’s link to all other species, the other takes pleasure in the small joys of bourgeois existence of the Restoration, when the Bourbon Kings ruled before the Revolution of 1830. This passage reveals the Goncourts’ attitude toward revolution, whether a scientific debate on the possibility of evolution that shakes the academy to its very foundation or a political revolt—ultimately a person must fit within the framework of society.

Interestingly, in the novel, virtually every subset of society is classified in terms of animals regardless of whether bohemian or bourgeois. In a café, while staring at the passersby outside, Anatole makes a farcical presentation of a Parisian man by describing him in a similar manner as a scientific text or a guidebook to the zoo:

Living, sirs! In the flesh!! Tall like a man! Nicknamed the King of the French!!! This animal ... comes from Province! His fur is a black coat ! [...] His brain! Sirs! Dissection made us know! One found inside, one found

inside, sirs, the bubbles from half a bottle of champagne! A piece of newspaper! The refrain from the Marseillaise!!! And nicotine and three thousand packets of cigars! He takes his manners from the cuckoo! He likes to make his children in the bed of others./

Vivant, messieurs! En personne naturelle!! Grand comme un homme! Surnommé Le Roi des Français!!! Cet animal! ... vient de province! Son pelage! Est un habit noir! [...] Sa cervelle! Messieurs! La dissection nous l'a fait connaître! On y trouve! On y trouve! Messieurs! Le gaz d'une demi-bouteille de champagne! Un morceau de journal! Le refrain de la Marseillaise!!! Et la nicotine et trois mille paquets de cigares!!! Pour les moeurs, il tient du coucou! Il aime à faire ses petits dans le lit des autres. (Goncourt 1996, 89)

“*En personne naturelle*” alludes to the novel’s attempts to unite nature and human society, a binary that became all the more prevalent during this time period. While Anatole’s description most likely pays homage to an amalgam of zoological treaties, the reference to the cuckoo is lifted directly from Buffon regarding the type of bird. In *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux*, the scientist uses empirical observations as well as dissections to confirm or deny myths surrounding the cuckoo including whether it lays its eggs in the nests of other birds (Buffon 1781, 438).

Similarly, Anatole’s mention of dissections could refer to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’s use of dissections to prove that animals of different species had homologous structures. After dissecting a lobster and placing it upside down, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire discovered that the lobster’s nervous system was above the digestive tract and the heart, leading him to argue that that the dorsal side of a mammal corresponded to the ventral side of arthropod (Gee 2007, 89). If mammals had descended from arthropods, one could infer that humans would be distant relatives of lobsters. Anatole’s comedic reference to the dissection of a Parisian places the man on the same level as any other species. The artist-scientist espouses progressive views from a growing part of the population who recognized the fundamental connection between humans and animals.

The Goncourts thus continue Balzac’s mission, guided by natural science, to categorize types of humans as if they were zoological species. However, the primary difference between this passage and Balzac’s *Comédie humaine*, or any natural scientific text for that manner, is the use of subversive farce. The bohemian artist plays the role of the scientific observer, who, punctuated by a series of exclamation points, mocks the seriousness of authority figures (such as the “King of the French,” Louis-Philippe) and the importance of human rationality. A trickster, Anatole indicates that if one dissected humans, one

might only find traces of cigars, champagne, newspaper clippings and verses of the French national anthem, instead of great cognitive abilities. By treating a Parisian man as just another species, Anatole, the artist-animal, reverses the majoritarian investment in the human reason and undermines the belief in human exceptionalism while still remaining a part of French society.

Manette Salomon thus proposes an art that is anti-rational and nonintellectual. The novel contains the fantasy of a naïve return to a mythical primitive existence. At the same time, this fantasy is presented as an integral part of modern life. According to Stéphanie Champeau, the Goncourt brothers believed that the artist has an extremely developed sensitivity, which could be similar to that of a nonhuman species (Champeau 2000, 57). The perceived connection between animals and artists stems from the idea that creativity relies on sensational or intuitive drives rather than rational or intellectual faculties. In his reading of *Manette Salomon*, Crouzet argues that modern art claims to stem from a “dis-intellectualized eye,” which attempts to display a true perception that is uncorrupted by technical artifice or acquired knowledge of how an object ought to look. The myth of the creative artist as naïve or innocent is found in the art critic John Ruskin’s influential book *The Elements of Drawing* (1856–1857), whose ideas circulated throughout Western Europe. Arthur Danto points out that Ruskin sought to reject previous conceptions, schools and models in his work and instead portray a sense of “ocular innocence” (Danto 1998, 21). For Ruskin, young artists were supposed to follow their own visual interpretation of nature rather than the guidance of masters, a myth that characterizes the Goncourts’ characters.

Artist-animals in *Manette Salomon* are both naïve and urbane. For example, in the novel, Chassignol, an artist friend of the protagonists, describes Coriolis as “a sensory machine. ... he who has eyes! How! He has his time before him, and he doesn’t see it! No, he doesn’t see it, that animal! / *Coriolis qui a ça, un tempérament, qui est doué, lui qui est quelqu’un, un nerveux, un sensitif ... une machine à sensations ... lui qui a des yeux! Comment ! Il a son temps devant lui, et il ne le voit pas ! Non, il ne voit pas, cet animal-là*” (Goncourt 1996, 418). While such sensitivity enables the artist to see creatively (“he who has eyes”), it also prevents him from achieving self-awareness (“he doesn’t see it!”). In this passage, the artist could be conceived of as a purely sentient being that is both animal-like and machine-like. This paradoxical image characterizes a particular aesthetic of mid-nineteenth-century France. As Benjamin points out, during the construction of iron and glass arcades in the city of Paris, “a primitive

contrivance formed—on analogy with the machine—from the materials of psychology, this mechanism made of men, produces the land of milk and honey, the primeval wish-symbol” (Benjamin 2003, 5). This quotation indicates that Fourier’s industrial utopia satisfies a type of human wish fulfillment or urge for a “primal” nature that merges this dualism. Similarly, Benjamin quotes Baron Haussmann, “I venerate the Beautiful, the Good, and all things great; Beautiful nature on which great art rests!” (Haussmann in Benjamin 2003, 23), critiquing his claim that his modern renovations of Paris were rooted in nature.

While *Manette Salomon* obviously differs from visual art—including both architectural developments and paintings in the nineteenth century—the novel is considered an example of visual writing or literary impressionism. However, the novel is set from 1840 to 1860, before the impressionist movement. One could argue, as Crouzet and Virginie Duzer do, that the Goncourt brothers anticipated the impressionist movement before it existed, incorporating the key elements of impressionist art in their literary tableau (Crouzet 1996, 31; Duzer 2013, 217). This novel depicts outdoor spaces that were written *sur scène*, such as the Jardin des Plantes and modern subjects such as the bohemian, Anatole (Duzer 2013, 217). In the novel, the authors emphasize the external qualities of objects such as color and shape. The authors also describe the way in which changes in light alter the physical appearance of objects and people. Some nineteenth-century reviewers such as Alphonse Duchesne applauded the novel for its artistic descriptions that resembled paintings (Goncourt 1996, 558). Because the novel is an example of literary impressionism that attempts to graphically describe the visual arts, the text itself demonstrates its own artifice. It uses painterly techniques to construct a primordial paradise within an urban setting. The novel thus reflects a similar mission as the Jardin des Plantes menagerie to mediate human-animal interaction.

2.3 THE JARDIN DES PLANTES: THE ARTISTIC GATEWAY

In a sketch of the Jardin des Plantes menagerie in Paris featured in *Illustration* in 1902, artists paint cramped lion and tiger cages. However, in the scattered paintings in front of them, the animals are depicted as magnificent and wild. No bars obscure their view. They are free. Upon seeing these works, the modern city dweller too may experience a sense of “natural liberty,” even if “caged” in society. However, these imagined representations of animals did not reflect the tragic reality of caged animals in

the urban sphere. In 1869, 40 percent of birds and mammals died within their first year in the menagerie. By the twentieth century, out of every animal that was visible at the zoo, ten had died in its place, mostly from their capture and transport (Baratay 2012, 203). Many of the exotic animals were also eaten by starving Parisians during the Commune in 1870, deflating the Goncourts' utopic dream of 1867.

Despite their actual circumstances, caged animals were a source of tremendous artistic inspiration. The nineteenth century is called “The Century of Zoos” and the “Golden Age” for the menagerie in Paris. After the Jardin des Plantes’ opening, the Madrid Zoo was founded in 1808, and Regent’s Park in London was created in 1828 (Héran 2012, 164). The Jardin des Plantes constructed a new aviary for birds of prey and a monkey house in the 1820s. Its newly acquired giraffe in 1827 attracted enormous crowds and inspired sculptures by Antoine-Louis Barye, paintings by Nicolas Huet and commentaries by Balzac (Vezin 1990, 69). The genre of *art animalier* was born.

From Delacroix’ lions to Bonheur’s tigers, the animals at the Jardin des Plantes occupied a privileged place in nineteenth-century French art and literature. In his elegiac poem on the garden, M.A. Dépasse writes, “While, far from the noise of the city/my muse searches for soft asylum/ … In this new Eden, Roses/remain longer half closed/*Lorsque, loin du bruit de la ville/ma muse cherche un doux asile/[…] Dans ce nouveau Éden, la Rose/Demeure plus longtemps mi-close*” (Dépasse 1842, 3–4). This haven supposedly preserves the life of flowers, offers inspiration and nourishes the creative soul.

Depicting the park as an idyllic escape from the chaos of city life, the novel opens with a guide giving a tour of the Jardin des Plantes. The guide tells the tourist-reader to lend him his eyes and the guide will make him see, indicating a mediated vision of the park (Goncourt 1996, 83).⁴ The Goncourts describe this space: “Between the tips of green trees, where the curtain of pines opened a little, the fragments of the big city extended as far as the eye could see/*Entre les pointes des arbres verts, là où s’ouvrait un peu le rideau des pins, des morceaux de la grande ville s’étendait à perte de vue*” (Goncourt 1996, 81). This quotation highlights both the artificial and the natural landscape of the Jardin des Plantes. The green pine trees mask the modern city of Paris like a curtain (*rideau*). Such imagery suggests that the Jardin des Plantes is almost like a theatrical set that hides the backstage of the venue. The pine curtain allows the visitor to partially lose his or her view of the city in favor of a more “natural” perspective. This garden creates

the myth that an artist painting in the Jardin des Plantes would efface his or her cultural conditioning and view the world from a more naïve understanding. At the same time, the viewer is still able to see the city. The text itself undermines the myth of nature as separate from the urban, revealing that the Jardin des Plantes is an artificial construction.

The work of Timothy Morton, an ecocritical scholar whose work juxtaposes English fiction and environmental studies, can illuminate readings of *Manette Salomon* by illustrating the ways in which the concept of “nature” was artificially constructed in the nineteenth century. As Morton writes, suburban nature, such as city or national parks and backyards, vacillates between appearing natural and artificial. On the one hand, parks and campsites rely on conveniences such as running water and trash cans to function. On the other hand, according to Morton, these spaces contain so many visual clues to suggest that they are “natural” that they become “super-natural” or “hyper-real.” In “All the Corners of the Buildings,” Morton writes, “We flip like a lenticular photo from artificial nature to natural artifice” (Morton 2009, np). Although Morton is discussing suburban nature in the twenty-first century, which is often mediated by photography or videography, *Manette Salomon* certainly contains these notions of “artificial nature” and “natural artifice.” As previously mentioned, the Goncourt brothers can be seen as the fathers of impressionist writing, and they write as if they were painting. For example, Duchesne wrote of *Manette Salomon* in 1867 that the authors do not write, but “paint” (Goncourt 1996, 557). The detailed visual descriptions in the novel contribute to its realism. Nineteenth-century criticism of *Manette Salomon* has either criticized or lauded its hyperrealism and likeness to painting. For example, Albert Wolff dismissed the novel in his article in *Le Figaro* on November 26th, 1867, for being too “realistic” and thus lacking imagination or intrigue. Wolff argued that the characters were “copies of reality” (Goncourt 1996, 556). However, Ducheneau applauded the novel because of its painterly qualities. Because the novel is self-conscious that it is a work of art, the authors’ descriptions of “nature” (or the Jardin des Plantes) use clear indications that they are artificial constructions.

Although the book presents the myth of artistic naïveté, the use of impressionistic writing makes the reader aware of its own artifice. The authors describe the Jardin des Plantes, stating, “Further along, at the last line of the horizon, a hill where the eye guessed a kind of obscuring of houses, the stages of a cliff in sea fog vaguely appeared. Above that, a cloud amassed over all of Paris. It was a heavy, dark purple haze / *Plus loin, à la dernière ligne de*

l'horizon, une colline où l'œil devinait une sorte d'enfouissement de maisons, figurait vaguement les étages d'une falaise dans un brouillard de mer. Là-dessus pesait un grand nuage, amassé sur tout le bout de Paris qu'il couvrait, une nuée lourde, d'un violet sombre” (Goncourt 1996, 81). The first clue that the Goncourt brothers allude to paintings in their written description is the word “line,” as if to indicate that the horizon is an artificial, painted line. “Vaguely” could suggest the vague, nebulous imagery of impressionism. Finally, the cloud that covers Paris masks the view of the city, just as the work itself attempts to mask (“obscuring” and “covered”) signs of urbanity, although it is continuously present in the text.

During this period, the Jardin des Plantes was the center for both artistic and scientific development. The novel describes this garden as not only a foundation for the avant-garde artistic movement, but also as the very heart of the city of Paris itself. One of the governmental purposes of the Jardin des Plantes was to create a menagerie that would be a beautiful, “living painting” of natural history to edify the public (Vezin 1990, 46). Similarly, the Muséum’s Galerie de Zoologie called itself the “Louvre de la science” in 1893 (Laissus and Petter 1993, 138). The comparison to a painting indicates that the menagerie is an artificial aesthetic construction that has little regard for the quality of life of the animals within it. As art historian Eric Baratay argues, the arrangement of animals in cages next to each other as if they were paintings does not take into account the stress that they may experience—brought on by foreign sounds and smells. In other words, animals are not inanimate works of art but living beings (Baratay 2012, 204). The Jardin des Plantes was also a hotbed of scientific knowledge, where new findings concerning animal behavior, hybridization and comparative anatomy were disseminated (Laissus and Petter 1993, 170). Public lectures on evolution and the ability to observe animals in captivity made people aware of their physiological relationship to animals.

Anatole, in his affinity with animals, experiences a sense of harmony with nature in this constructed paradise. In fact, one definition of “paradise” means a park or garden surrounded by trees, alluding to the Garden of Eden (Renan 1863, 200). According to animal theorists Rothfels and Steven Spotte, modern zoos are often described in religious terms such as “Ark,” “Eden” and “Kingdom of God” (Rothfels 2002, 211; Spotte 2006, 92). The depiction of the menagerie as a spiritual promised land reflects an emerging role for zoos to be heavenly sanctuaries that preserve animals from extinction as well as giving city dwellers an escape from the pressures of urban life.

In contrast, outside the garden's protective gates, the bohemian artist is unable to fit within society. He leaves the "heaven" of the garden and enters the "hell" of the artist's studio, located on Rue d'Enfer. In the *atelier*, artists are rewarded for espousing unoriginal ideas and imitating conventional styles. The novel's depiction of the artist as thriving in nature instead of the *atelier* reflects the shift from painting in the studio to painting *en plein air*. As Edmond de Goncourt wrote in his journals when imagining a scene in *Manette Salmon* inside an *atelier*: "Like Turner, I am looking for a day that is virgin, primordial/*Comme Turner, je suis à la recherche d'un jour vierge, Primordial*" (Goncourt 1989, 815).

The prominence of the Jardin in this artistic novel—which begins and ends in its menagerie—indicates a connection between viewing animals and creating art. One of the purposes of the Jardin is to provide the urbane artist with access to particular flora and fauna that he or she would normally not be able to view in Paris. In turn, this experience would enable the artist to better depict the "natural" world. According to the pamphlet *Notice on the Degree of Utility of the Natural History Museum of Thermidor*, published in 1792, the menagerie seeks to reshape the role of the artist, as a "faithful copier" of nature in contrast to an artist who would "dishonor" his work by depicting animals according to previous artistic representations (Vezin 1990, 46). This myth is similar to that of the Goncourt brothers. For example, the authors write of Anatole, "He spent days studying animals at the Jardin des Plantes. He reported their voice and their song/*Des journées qu'il passait au Jardin des Plantes à étudier les animaux, il rapportait leur voix, leur chant*" (Goncourt 1996, 105). This artist's ability to study and imitate the sounds of animals creates the fantasy that he can communicate with other species. As Lathers suggests, the Jardin des Plantes becomes a natural *atelier* where painters portray their experience with nature (Lathers 2001, 147). The word "reported" in *Manette Salmon* indicates that the artist functions as a reporter. He may enter into a world of animals and then report back his findings to a human public.

The mission of the biological or zoological park in nineteenth-century Europe was to be a meeting place for people to interact with other living creatures, enabling them to recall "notions of a primitive yearning stamped onto the human psyche early in our evolution" (Spotte 2006, 13). These parks also served as refuges from industrial pollution. For example, an 1860 guidebook of the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park in London states that industrial smoke "is somehow magically lifted at the Gardens, a place

where thoughtful people could find the opportunity to contemplate the striking contrasts between the densely populated city and hushed nature" (quoted in Rothfels 2002, 207). *Manette Salomon* illustrates a similar psychic and physical need for green spaces for quiet reflection, which, as discussed in the introduction to this book, is coded as "animal": The artist Coriolis feels the need to spend time "in the healthy, calm air of vegetation. The animal in him needed to be in green spaces. Also he was pleased to be in this space that was so dead to all the noises of the capital/*la bête, chez lui, avait besoin de se mettre au vert. Aussi eut-il Plaisir à se sentir dans cet endroit si bien mort à tous les bruits d'une capitale*" (Goncourt 1996, 328). The artist-animal is emblematic of the modern subject who moves between the chaotic metropolis and constructed ecological sanctuaries. Like the Jardin des Plantes, the artistic colony of the Barbizon forest offers solace and creative insight through a connection to a diversity of species not found in everyday Paris.

2.4 BARBIZON: THE PEASANT ARTIST

In the novel, the characters travel from the labyrinthine garden to the forests of Fontainebleau, far from the vast chaos of the Parisian skyline. Both green spaces have a tremendous impact on the artists. As Vincent Pomarède and Gérard de Wallens write, "The Goncourt brothers both sought words that would allow them to render in literature the shivering impact of nature, felt when one attentively and intensively studies a landscape/*Les frères Goncourt—ont cherché chacun à leur tour les mots qui permettraient de rendre en littérature ce frémissement de la nature ressenti lorsqu'on étudie attentivement et intensivement un paysage*" (2002, 11). From promenades among zebras and gazelles in Paris to the "tête-à-tête" encounters with cows and chickens in fields of the Barbizon, exposure to nonhuman, nonurban life becomes an essential part of a new aesthetic. Whereas the menagerie is a spiritual asylum for Anatole, Coriolis experiences an artistic breakthrough in Barbizon.

The forest, along with the traumatic shock of Vermillon's death, transforms him from an Orientalist to a Realist painter. Coriolis' experience in Barbizon contributes to his artistic shift and his discovery of the "natural" within his own society. The novel proposes that leaving Paris to experience pastoral life is essential to the character's artistic development. However, it is only through the integration of this experience with Parisian existence that the character may achieve artistic clarity. The artist-animal, hence,

flocks to urban parks or suburban wilderness, where the organic comingles with the cosmopolitan. Coriolis' shift thus mirrors the Goncourts' own literary revolt against Romanticism, which David Carroll describes as inflating the status of the self and one's own sentimentalized, nationalistic identity in contrast to a foreign "other" (Carroll 1998, 80–83). While *Manette Salomon* attempts to assimilate the foreign into Parisian society, the novel also expresses an emerging aesthetic that focuses on life beyond the uniquely human—illustrating a shared existence amongst plants, people and animals.

Coriolis, Manette and Anatole arrive in Barbizon, where a new school of artists practice a revolutionary genre of landscape painting, featuring farmers working in fields with domesticated creatures. The group's caretakers are uneducated peasants—Crescent is a painter and Madame Crescent takes care of the barnyard animals. The Crescents' deep connection to nature initiates a new process of seeing and painting for their visitors. Crescent is probably based upon the work of Millet, one of the founders of the Barbizon school, who painted pastoral scenes of shepherds and gleaners (Moore 1916, 48). Millet embodies the myth of the artist-animal, described by the Goncourt brothers as the "master pig" (Goncourt 1989, 45). The fictional description of Barbizon echoes the actual artistic school, which existed from 1830 to 1870. Painting *en plein air* in the countryside and focusing on the changing seasons and landscape, the Barbizon artists sought a personal relationship with plants and wildlife (Kelder 1980, 14).

The Barbizon forest was a remote spot where sophisticated Parisians sought a preindustrial refuge where religious and picturesque farmers dwelled, whose folk art would inspire candor and sincerity (Rosenblum and Janson 1994, 421). This school of art contrasts with the Orientalist tradition of only painting exotic settings and the historical painting tradition in which nature serves as a background for culturally important events. Coriolis ironically exclaims after his trip, "Ah! My dear, the Orient ... the Orient! ... I only make nonsense / *Ah! Mon cher, l'Orient ... l'Orient! ... Moi je n'ai fait que de la cochonnerie*" (Goncourt 1996, 401). However, like the Orient, Barbizon was a release valve for Parisian artists who sought the simplicity that was lacking in European society. Of course, in their idealization of these peasants, the city dwellers ignored the arduous labor of daily tasks and the devastating economic conditions that eventually contributed to the Revolution of 1848.

In the novel, Coriolis spends time watching Crescent paint. The narrator idealizes Crescent as naïve, arguing that he is “without instruction, without education, not reading anything, not even a newspaper, ignorant even of what government existed/*sans instruction, sans éducation, ne lisant rien, pas même un journal, ignorant de tout et du gouvernement qu'il faisait*” (Goncourt 1996, 373). The negative expressions in this sentence, *sans, ne...* *rien*, and *même pas*, nullify the importance of various aspects of culture and civilization: education, books, newspapers and government. The negations strip away all unnecessary cultural forms, in essence creating a *tabula rasa*, where true creation begins. In this context, the novel indicates that it requires virtually nothing to be a talented artist, only the basic materials and an eye that is sensitive to light and form. As precursors to Zola and Laforgue, the Goncourts define painting as simply a reproduction of the optic nerve that requires neither skill nor training (Champeau 2000, 205).

The myth that Crescent is a painter who paints “from nature” and not according to academic mandates or to intellectual faculties is similar to the ideas of Buffon. The naturalist writes in *Histoire naturelle* (1754): “Artists are only able to create with labor and succession because the human mind can only capture one dimension at a time; and our senses are only superficial ... Nature by contrast knows how to brew and stir to the bottom; it develops things and stretches them out into three dimensions/*L'Artiste n'est arrivé qu'avec peine et successivement; parce que l'esprit humain ne saisissant à la fois qu'une seule dimension, et nos sens ne s'appliquant qu'aux surfaces [...] la Nature, au contraire, sait la brasser et la remuer au fond; [...] elle les développe en les étendant à la fois dans les trois dimensions*” (Buffon 1754, 214). Buffon describes the limitation of the human intelligence to capture the rich nuances of the external world. The human mind is only unidimensional, whereas nature is multidimensional. Buffon portrays nature as a painter, which displays the world in its minute detail and infinite complexity. Nature’s vast canvas is filled with a profusion of shapes and colors. Conversely, human intellect is linear and contained. In this particular context, Buffon laments the gap between the artist of his time period and nature. The nineteenth-century response to this separation is to depict the avant-garde artist as an intercessor between man and the environment. Whereas Buffon pronounces nature as a painter, the Goncourt brothers designate Crescent as a painter who is one with nature.

In *Manette Salomon*, Crescent and Coriolis share an interdependent relationship, similar to that of Anatole and Vermillon, where both artists

learn from each other. “Coriolis, delighted to finally find a painter who spoke a little of his art; Crescent, the savage, living apart from the other inhabitants in the country, happy to meet a clever conversationalist to talk about his painting, it reminded him of the paintings seen in shop windows, he analyzed them as a man who had studied them, smelled them, and felt them/*Coriolis enchanté de trouver enfin un peintre qui parlât un peu de son art; Crescent, le sauvage, vivant à l'écart des habitants du pays, tout heureux de rencontrer un causeur intelligent qui l'entretenant de sa peinture, lui rappelait des tableaux vus à des vitrines de marchands, les analysait en homme qui les avait étudiés, flairés, sentis*” (Goncourt 1996, 369). Coriolis’ urbane *savoir faire* comingles with Crescent’s naïve instinct, a dualism essential to the new aesthetic of the Second Empire. As Baudelaire writes, modern art lies “where the natural man and the man of convention reveal themselves in a bizarre beauty, where the sun lights up the fleeting joys of the depraved animal/*où l’homme naturel et l’homme de convention se montrent dans une beauté bizarre, où le soleil éclaire les joies rapides de l’animal dépravé*” (Baudelaire 1999, 516). For Baudelaire, great art requires attention to eternal elements such as the sun and the seasons and attention to the modern trends of civilization. The painter of modern life aims to depict “the gesture, the gaze, the smile/*le geste, le regard, le sourire*” of a particular time period (Baudelaire 1999, 518). He or she is a cross between Coriolis and Crescent, in essence, an artist-animal.

Another exchange that occurs in the novel is that the Crescents teach Coriolis and Anatole to be compassionate toward animals, especially regarding their deaths. A vegetarian, Madame Crescent feels “a communion with animals regarding suffering, their pains, their joys stirred a bit in her womb. She felt her life being lived in them/*une communion de souffrances avec les bêtes, leurs maux, leurs joies lui remuaient un peu les entrailles. Elle sentait vivre de sa vie en elles*” (Goncourt 1996, 367). The farmer feels a sense of oneness with other creatures and experiences their pain as her own. Although the term “womb” speaks to a sense of empathy with animals that is specifically female, Millet is said to have felt a similar sense of oneness with other species. He even claimed to have foreseen his own death after witnessing the death of a stag. “In January 1875, a stag was pursued into a garden nearby and tortured to death. Millet heard it all. ‘It is prognostic,’ he said; ‘that poor animal, which has died near me, announces without doubt that I too am going to die.’ January 20th, 1875, the long struggle ended” (Smith 1903, 61). Fictional and biographical accounts of Millet claim that he was so connected with animals that he did not separate the death of a deer from his own death.

In *Manette Salomon*, the tragic death of Vermillon represents a sort of artistic death in Coriolis—the end of the exotic, oriental splendor that attracted so many of Coriolis' fictional viewers. In terms of Lathers' analysis, one could interpret this shift as an assimilation into Parisian culture, similar to the ways in which the foreign animals in the Jardin des Plantes had to acclimate to living in a French, urban environment (Lathers 2001, 150). In addition to this interpretation, I inquire into the ways in which animality is portrayed as a cataclysmic and creative force. In the novel, the painters return to Paris to find the monkey dying from the cold. "Life, as it comes into these small, delicates, vivacious and nervous creatures struggled cruelly in this unlucky little body/*La vie, comme il arrive chez ces petits êtres délicats, vivaces et nerveux, se débattait cruellement dans ce malheureux petit corps*" (Goncourt 1996, 404). The monkey's death in the novel signifies a breaking point with previous forms of art and indicates a new beginning. As Bernard Vouilloux writes, "Coriolis anagram of coloris(t) dies in Vermillon/*Coriolis anagramme de Coloriste (Coloris) meurt dans Vermillon*" (Vouilloux 1997, 89). Coriolis no longer paints brilliantly colored, exotic paintings and, instead, focuses on realistically portraying life around him, even the smallest and most delicate creatures.

Shortly after the death of Vermillon, Coriolis has a transformative experience while watching Parisians walk along the street. "He questioned the faces of people who ran around the streets like ants in an anthill/*Il interrogeait ces faces de gens qui courrent dans les rues comme la fourmi dans la fourmilière*" (Goncourt 1996, 412). Coriolis decides to focus on the modern Parisian in his or her own milieu rather than scenes of oriental splendor. Coriolis observes "animals" in their environment like scientists observing ants in an ant colony. In order to understand the intricate relationship of an organism to his or her environment, the artist can conceive of humans as if they were animals in their natural habitats. In a way, Coriolis' transition to being a "painter of modern life" is a process of integrating what is conventionally split between human and the nonhuman.

He was at the critical moment, at that time of the life of an artist when the artist feels something die in him like the first consciousness of his art: the moment of doubt, of being torn between being habitually talented and a vocation that suited his personality. He felt a foreboding agitation in him, the presentiment of other forms, other visions, the beginning of new ways of seeing, of feeling, of wanting painting./

Il était à ce moment critique, à cette heure de la vie d'un artiste où l'artiste sent mourir en lui comme le premier conscience de son art: l'instant de doute, de tiraillé, entre les habitudes de son talent et la vocation de sa personnalité. Il sent tressaillir et s'agiter en lui le pressentiment d'autres formes, d'autres visions, le commencement de nouvelles façons de voir, de sentiment, de vouloir la peinture. (Goncourt 1996, 413)

Coriolis comes into a new way of painting that is no longer shadowed by the naïveté of his youth. He also experiences an artistic transformation on a basic physiological level (“He felt a foreboding agitation in him...”), which shatters imitation and allows the artist to come into a new way of seeing (“other visions, the beginning of new ways of seeing”). The use of the verb “to feel/sentir” indicates a domination of the physiological over psychological or cultural restrictions (“doubt,” “habit,” “personality”). In terms of Deleuzian thought, this moment could be an example of destroying “the framework of habitual perception, training oneself to perceive in new ways [...] It breaks the boundaries of organic activity/*les cadres de sa perception habituelle, l'entraînant dans ces nouvelles manières de sentir [...] Elle rompt les bornes de l'activité organique*” (Bouaniche 2010, 208). In this passage, the Goncourts illustrate a triumph of the physical over the metaphysical. Thus, in addition to undermining classical notions of art, animality is a means of shaking free of the stranglehold of Empirical mandates and forced ways of seeing that have been tied to authoritarian regimes for centuries. In the beginning of the novel, the Goncourts describe “the generation that was growing up, the army of young people nourished in history or religious painting practices, fatally went to these two superior and dominant personalities/*la génération qui se levait, l'armée des jeunes gens nourris dans la pratique de la peinture historique or religieuse, allait fatalement aux deux personnalités supérieures et dominantes*” (Goncourt 1996, 16). Animality is instead tied to Realism because it is linked to seeing everyday life as the physical eye sees, rather than being forced to succumb to how and what “superior and dominant personalities” want one to see. However, while Coriolis espouses a realist aesthetic that upholds the common citizen over majoritarian regimes, Aaron Jossart notes that the Goncourt brothers have written in their journals that Realism was an “insincere disregard for the methodology of painting. Realists chose subjects that were too real” and lacked the “beauty of ugliness” (Jossart 2008, 150). “Too real” implies that painting requires some artifice. For the authors, ideal art could again be a meeting of the “primitive eye” (Crescent) and the sophisticated city dweller (Coriolis).

The Jardin des Plantes is a metropolitan version of this mélange between the rural and the refined.

In his journal on January 19, 1847, after viewing the elephants, rhinoceroses and hippopotamuses of the Jardin des Plantes, Delacroix expressed his profound happiness, which increased the further he explored:

It seemed to me that my being rose above the vulgarities, the little ideas, or the little anxieties of the moment. What a prodigious variety of animals and what variety of species, forms, destination! At every moment, what seems to be deformity beside what seems to be grace./

Il me semblait que mon être s'élevait au-dessus des vulgarités ou des petites idées, ou des petites inquiétudes du moment. Quelle variété prodigieuse d'animaux et quelle variété d'espèces, de formes, de destination! A chaque instant, ce que nous paraît la difformité à côté de ce qui nous semble la grâce. (Delacroix 1996, 117)

According to the Romantic painter, the gardens expanded his horizons beyond the trifling matters of a mundane insistence. The variety of shapes and types of creatures—where the deformed comingle with the divine—augments the artist's sense of happiness and exposes him to a multitude of new artistic forms. Anatole shares this ecstatic sensation at the end of the novel.

The bohemian moves to an apartment next to the Jardin des Plantes, which is described as a divine abode. “*He abandons himself to all these things. He forgets himself, he loses himself in seeing, hearing and aspiring/Il s'abandonne à toutes ces choses, Il s'oublie, il se perdre à voir, à écouter, à aspirer*

” (Goncourt 1996, 547). Nature becomes for Anatole a sort of *tabula rasa* where all previous knowledge is effaced. The book ends with the sentence, “In the middle of this universe of familiar and trustworthy animals, as if returning to a divine land, the former bohemian relived the joys of Eden, and he felt rising inside of him, in an almost celestial manner, something like the felicity of the first man in front of virgin nature/*Au milieu de cet univers d'animaux familiers et confiants comme sur une terre divine encore, l'ancien Bohème revit des joies d'Eden et il s'élève en lui, presque célestement, comme un peu de la félicité du premier homme en face de la Nature vierge*” (Goncourt 1996, 547). The novel constructs the fantasy that the entrance of the Jardin des Plantes becomes a portal to Eden, a spiritual haven where the artist experiences the happiness that Adam must have felt, unburdened by the heavy weight of knowledge, history or societal expectations.

This passage reinforces the nineteenth-century quest for an “absolute original state” of being in which one would experience a sense of interconnectedness and wholeness (Crouzet 1996, 50). However, as previously mentioned, Anatole achieves oneness with nature by becoming a zoo-keeper: “Enclosing the sun and the ferocious beasts in the cages of the menagerie where the red lions walk in the flame of the hour, where the tiger that passes back and forth seems at each time to take onto the stripes of his coat one of the stripes of his bars/ *Anatole a devant lui la ménagerie enfermant le soleil et les féroces dans les cages de la ménagerie, où le roux des lions marche dans la flamme de l'heure, où le tigre qui passe et repasse semble emporter chaque fois sur les raies de sa robe les raies de ses barreaux*” (Goncourt 1996, 545). This passage could be read as: the stripes on the tiger correspond to the stripes on the cage, indicating that the status of animals is analogous to a prisoner. This tragic image reflects the treatment of animals in the nineteenth century. This passage is one of the only times that the novel mentions that animals were in cages in the menagerie. The artistic representation of caged animals is rare in the nineteenth century because perhaps one would prefer to imagine them as free instead of in deplorable states of confinement (Vezin 1990, 54).

According the *Illustrated Supplement* of the *Petit Journal* on March 31st, 1895, titled “The New Feline Rotunda in the Jardin des Plantes,” the cages for lions and tigers in the late nineteenth century were cramped and contributed to animals’ unhappiness and illness (“The New Feline Rotunda in the Jardin des Plantes” 1895, 103). It is perplexing why a nineteenth-century public which was so fascinated by the similarities between humans and animals would keep them in such wretched conditions that the animals would become ill. Perhaps menageries are a means of confining, controlling and dominating that which is not human. Although, in some ways, the Biblical and Buffonian conception that man should have dominion over animals began to shift in the mid-nineteenth century, the institution of the menagerie reveals the cruel mistreatment of animals at this time. As Derrida elucidates, during the past two centuries, we have witnessed unparalleled knowledge developments in the domains of zoology, biology and ethology. However, we have also witnessed unprecedented violence and subjection of animals (Derrida 2008, 25).

On the other hand, the fictional tiger in *Manette Salomon* is mobile inside his cage. He is able to “pass back and forth” in spite of his confinement. The constraint of the cage could even protect the tiger from harm. According to Rothfels, zoological historians argue that nineteenth- and twentieth-century

zoos differ from the menageries of the past because their aim is to educate, edify and entertain the public and conserve animals rather than to demonstrate imperial power (2002, 38). Modern zoos employ the myth that they are actually beneficial to both the public and the animals. Zoos claim to protect and to preserve species of animals that are disappearing in great numbers due to human-induced environmental destruction. “The animals are otherwise happy here because they are no longer free. [...] One can conserve them for longer, and it is a pleasure to see them leap and exhibit their own attitudes” (“The New Feline Rotunda in the Jardin des Plantes” 1895, 103).

In this sense, while the urban environment destroys animals and plants, it also employs institutions to nurture and protect them. Wildlife is only able to exist in modern, urban society if it is constrained in a zoo. Similarly, the marginal artist, who is depicted as close to an animal, requires certain societal constraints in order to survive in the modern world. During his life as a bohemian artist, Anatole is described as a parasite several times in the novel. He must live off other people and stay in his friends’ houses because he cannot afford to live on his own. When he stays with Coriolis and Manette, Manette “made Anatole return to his humble place in the house, to the inferiority and parasitism of his position/*faisait redescendre Anatole à l'humble place qu'il avait dans la maison, à l'infériorité et au parasitisme de sa position*” (Goncourt 1996, 436). Anatole is like a domestic animal that functions as a parasite on his owners and is forced to “stay in his place” and be treated as an inferior. His status is similar to the status of animals in modern cities that usually cannot survive on their own accord without being kept as pets in homes or as prisoners in zoos.

Anatole is finally able to become self-supporting through his career as a zookeeper at the end of the novel. Interestingly, according to the article in the *Petit Journal* on the new lion cage in the Jardin des Plantes, the zoo-keeper is a defender of animals who does not see them as inferior to human beings. “As the brave zookeeper said, ‘They are animals like us’” (“The New Feline Rotunda in the Jardin des Plantes” 1895, 103). Both Seigel and Champeau note the irony in that by giving up a bohemian lifestyle for a governmental job, Anatole is able to achieve a harmony with nature in an idyllic paradise (Champeau 2000, 48; Seigel 1999, 172). This idea might suggest that any artist who desires to be connected to nature must have the financial means to support himself. He or she must in some way still be part of civilization. The novel affirms the artist’s mythical affinity with animals. Conversely, at the end of the novel, Anatole is connected to animals in his role as a zookeeper in a menagerie who locks animals in cages.

The Jardin des Plantes thus is an intermediary between the natural world and modern civilization. As a zookeeper, the modern artist is supposedly able to experience “great animal joy/*grand bonheur animal*” (Goncourt 1996, 547) and still exercise human domination over animals. In contrast, there are many instances throughout the novel where the avant-garde artist seeks to liberate his or her own perception from social conditioning. Perhaps one could think of Deleuze and Guattari’s idea expressed in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* that becoming animal is a means of fleeing oppression even if it takes place in a cage (Deleuze and Guattari 1975, 35).⁵ Although Anatole is confined to being a part of civil society with his governmental job and his only exposure to animals is through bars, he is still, in some sense, liberated. For Deleuze and Guattari, animals signify a creative line of escape from the constraints and institutions of society (Deleuze and Guattari 1975, 35).⁶ This process may even occur within a cage or within the shackles of human civilization because “becoming animal” indicates a transformation during which a person perceives differently from the rest of human society even if he still exists within that society. This transformation is a creative one, allowing for the possibility of novel, artistic breakthroughs.

This study has already mentioned the trope of the “innocent eye,” that the artist sees in a naïve, animalistic manner. The final scene in the novel presents Anatole’s entire body as being infused with nature, where all of life around him penetrates his very being:

He let himself melt into it and stayed wading in its stream. A delicious sensation comes upon him like ancient metamorphoses that plant men in the Earth and make them grow branches for arms. He glides into the surrounding beings. It seems to him that he is a bit present in everything that flies, in everything that crawls, in everything that runs./

Ce qui est autour de lui le pénètre par tous les pores, et la Nature l’embrassant par tous le sens, il se laisse couler en elle, et reste à s’y tremper. Une sensation délicieuse lui vient en monte le long de lui comme en ces métamorphoses antiques qui replantaient l’homme dans la Terre, en lui faisant pousser des branches aux jambes. Il glisse dans l’être des êtres qui sont là. Il lui semble qu’il est un peu dans tout ce qui vole, dans tout ce qui croit, dans tout ce qui court. (Goncourt 1996, 547)

This ending is a depiction of Anatole’s sense of oneness with his environment; he becomes a part of nature. Anatole feels as if he metamorphoses into a tree and then later into different types of animals. The repetition of the word “everything” (*tout*) emphasizes the sensation of oneness because the animals are not individuated.

In addition to the fantasy of a return to wholeness, the text also reveals the creative freedom of Anatole to metamorphose into other creatures and objects. Anatole's lack of fixed identity and his affiliation with animals gives him infinite creative potential to shift and to transform. The possibility of metamorphosis could be linked to novel and revolutionary art that no longer upholds social rules or normative constructions (Bouaniche 2010, 21). However, because Anatole only finds this freedom inside the institution of the Jardin des Plantes, he is both bound and liberated by social norms and codes.

Through the journeys of Coriolis and Anatole through the forest and public park, *Manette Salomon* emphasizes the qualities of “artificial nature” and “natural artifice” as key to a new genre of painting. In its attempt to bridge the gap between the urbanized and the natural world, the novel naturalizes many of the horrors of modern civilization, such as the mistreatment and cruelty of animals in the Jardin des Plantes and the society’s colonialist attitudes that seek to assimilate all that is foreign or marginal. Because of these societal pressures and conventions, the modern artist is perhaps akin to a “caged animal” in the Jardin des Plantes. His livelihood and survival are dependent on adopting the mores and practices of his society, yet his imagined affinity with animals and nature makes him open and receptive to the creative forces of the universe.

Manette Salomon is thus truly an ambivalent text. As Malamud argues, the critical reader must resist being enticed by descriptions of the menagerie as a natural wonderland. The novel champions the conservationist claim that zoos are spaces to protect fragile creatures that would otherwise perish in modern cities. However, as Pick writes, zoos, as gloomy institutions that imprison animals, play a role in their eventual disappearance (Pick 2011, 104). Furthermore, as Derrida argues, the very linguistic and philosophical construct of “the animal” as a category separate from human existence is responsible for its physical separation behind bars: “as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are all the living things that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers” (Derrida 2008, 34). In uttering this binary category, one draws a line between “us” and “them,” reinforced by material barriers, where the other may be subjected to atrocious acts of violence. On the one hand, Goncourt’s description of the suffering of nonhuman creatures may incite compassion. On the other, to take such compassion seriously, as Derrida advocates, one would have to have call into question the whole concept of what it means to be an animal. Rather than focusing on whether animals share the same

cognitive abilities as humans, Derrida refers to the famous question posed by Jeremy Bentham posed in 1823, “The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” (Bentham 1823, 236).

At the same time, *Manette Salomon* should also be recognized as a groundbreaking novel in the field of animal studies. The novel is a literary narrative that attempts to explain some of the most remarkable art in human history in terms of biological processes, which are shared by both humans and animals. As McHugh asserts, the field of animal studies “pushes the limits of exclusively human ways of being” (McHugh 2011, 7). *Manette Salomon* denies the assumption that artistic creativity is a uniquely human process. Despite the horrors of the menagerie, it is difficult not to revel in the sublime beauty of Barye’s lions, Delacroix’s tigers or Rousseau’s monkeys, all painted at the Jardin des Plantes. The nineteenth century witnessed an incredible interest in animals and a profound appreciation for animal beauty that still exists today. One can only hope that this aesthetic admiration for animals will eventually translate to a concern for their well-being and rights.

NOTES

1. The novel could reflect a mid-nineteenth-century viewpoint that humans and animals may share similar emotions. In *Guide pittoresque au Jardin des Plantes*, written in 1851, A. Henry relates animal cries to human emotion, claiming that a hyena’s yelp resembles the moaning of someone who is seasick (12). He believes that a group of monkeys’ conversation must be interesting given the rapidity of the ways they move their lips (Henry 15). He comments on the primates’ fight as: “It’s a little like with us/*C'est à peu près comme chez nous*” (Henry 14–15). Although the author anthropomorphizes the animals within a guide that is coded as factual, the phrase “*comme chez nous*” is an attempt to identify with these mammals as if they were human.
2. See “À propos de *Manette Salomon*. L’œuvre des Goncourt” in *La Revue de Paris* of March 15th, 1896.
3. “The Goncourts sought to exorcise the demon of imitation in using parrots or monkey artists as characters [*Les Goncourt cherchent à] exorciser le démon de l’imitation en suscitant des personnages perroquets, des artistes-singes*” (Cabanès 93). Lathers argues that “the monkey painter theme was an effective parody of realism or naturalism” (157).
4. “Lend me your eye... I won’t abuse it. Come, mesdames and messieurs, I am going to make you see what you are going to see!/*Confiez-moi votre oeil ... Je n’en abuserai pas! Approchez, Mesdames et messieurs! Je vais vous faire voir ce que vous allez voir!*” (Goncourt, *Manette Salomon* 83).

5. “Nous disons que, pour Kafka, l’essence animale est l’issu, la ligne de fuite, même sur place ou dans la cage.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Kafka pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1975, p. 35.
6. “C’est une ligne de fuite créatrice” (Deleuze and Guattari 65).

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CHAPTER 3

Buffon Versus the Beast: Taming the Wild Artist in Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*

In the dark woods of the Parisian suburb Saint-Ouen, reminiscent of Courbet's painting *The Stream* (1855) (Fig. 3.1), Thérèse, protagonist of Émile Zola's novel *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), sits immobile in a boat on the Seine. Her husband Camille, a public servant who fears nature, and lover Laurent, an artist, struggle in the water beside her. Like a predator competing for a mate, Laurent attacks Camille and drowns him in the river. When the characters leave the protective city limits, social codes disintegrate. In contrast, once the adulterous couple returns to Paris, Camille's specter haunts and tortures them. Laurent is like a bear in his natural habitat, which attacks its prey in murky waters, only to be caged in a burgeoning metropolis.

In my study of *Thérèse Raquin*, I claim that the characters reflect the tension between a Buffonian view that appreciates nature, but places man in the very center, and a Darwinian understanding that humans have ancestral connections to other forms of life. As I have previously argued within the field of ecocriticism, the ambivalence concerning man's place in regards to other species at the end of the Industrial Revolution is at the heart of Zola's naturalism (Nettleton 2017, 15). Furthermore, living in an age of massive urban development, Camille and Laurent incarnate competing attitudes regarding the city's encroachment into wildlife. This chapter will focus on the way in which *Thérèse Raquin* also expands upon



Fig. 3.1 Gustave Courbet. *The Stream*, 1855. National Gallery of Art NGA Images. Public Domain

the 1830 debate on animal transformation between Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Cuvier that was central to Balzac's realism, within the post-Darwinian scientific and the revolutionary aesthetic context of the Second Empire. Laurent represents the emerging trope of a creative figure—whom critics have linked to Cézanne, Zola's childhood friend, and Manet, whom Zola avidly defended—that is in tune with the supposedly irrational forces of the physical body independent of artistic expectations. His instinct to slaughter his competitor both in person and on the canvas equates art with primal killing—yet is squelched by societal mandates. Finally, given its indecisive portrayal of both animals and avant-garde artists, I ask contemporary readers to compare *Thérèse Raquin* to readings in the field of literary and visual animal studies and inquire: Does this novel have revolutionary potential despite its limitations? Moreover, does Laurent's proximity to nonhuman species—particularly his disregard for social mores and his rudimentary techniques—support or hinder his creative abilities?

In the beginning of the novel, Camille saunters through Paris to watch the bear pit in the Jardin des Plantes:

He gazed at them with his eyes and mouth wide open, feeling an idiotic delight in beholding them move. At length he would make up his mind to go home, walking slowly, amusing himself with the passersby, the vehicles, the shops./

Il les examinait, les lèvres ouvertes, les yeux arrondis, goûtant une joie d'imbécile à les voir se remuer. Il se décidait enfin à rentrer, traînait les pieds, s'occupant des passants, des voitures, des magasins. (Zola 1992, 33; 1953, 29)

This bourgeois bureaucrat and avid reader of Buffon treats animals as mere objects of study, which should be assimilated into urban life like passersby, coaches and shops. While Camille observes animals, Laurent is an animal—supposedly dominated entirely by instinct. The struggle between Laurent and Camille is representative of two opposing world-views: one espouses the fixity of species and the passé societal values of reason, order and man's dominance over flora and fauna. The other—represented by the artist—represents the possibility of evolution and the concepts of “human,” “animal” and “nature” being interlinked. While the novel does involve characters in a complex network of human-animal relations—from the pet cat François to caged bears at the Jardin des Plantes—Zola's work primarily constructs the notion of the *human animal* as pivotal to avant-garde aesthetics and Zola's Naturalism, whose mission was detailed in the preface as “to seek the animal/*chercher ... la bête*” within his characters (Zola 1953, 9, translations mine unless otherwise indicated). This idea was inspired by evolutionary science of the time. Zola was indeed exposed to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Darwin via Claude Bernard's *Introduction à l'étude de la Médecine Expérimentale* (1865) and the naturalist discusses Darwin at length in *Germinal* (1885). However, he explicitly mentions Buffon in *Thérèse Raquin* as a point of contrast to the supposed radical behavior of the artist-animal.

Despite *Thérèse Raquin*'s status as a triumph in visual writing, Laurent's affiliation with nonhuman species has been interpreted as a sign of both artistic and social failure. Robert Lethbridge and Theodore Reff have demonstrated the influence of Manet's *Olympia* on the novel, including stark contrasts between black-and-white figures and the ominous presence of a cat (Lethbridge 1980, 291; Reff 1975, 43). *Thérèse Raquin*, written during a period that was pre-impressionist and barely post-Darwinian, expresses ambivalence to both avant-gardists and animals. While the artist's proximity to animals makes him revolutionary, it also leaves him vulnerable and dependent. Like Anatole in *Manette*

Salomon, Laurent is confined within a capitalistic system and reliant on patronage for survival just as zoo animals, pets or scavengers are dependent on others for food (Zola 1953, 33).

On the one hand, Zola's use of the words "la bête" and "la brute," to describe Laurent, vague and pejorative terms that are independent of species, essentializes the constructs of humanity and animality despite the novel's attempts to efface them. In addition, the novel equates the nonhuman with being determined by carnal desires. This singularization and demonification of creatures discount the multiplicity of species and individuals, as articulated by Derrida. However, Zola also advocates empathy toward nonhuman creatures: "Ah! Animality, all that crawls and all that moans beneath man, what a place of immense sympathy we must make for it in the history of life/ *Ah! L'animalité, tout ce qui se traîne et tout ce qui se lamente au-dessous de l'homme, quelle place d'une sympathie immense il faudrait lui faire dans une histoire de la vie!*" (Zola 2017, 139). As Louise Westling claims, "Since Darwin and Einstein, philosophers and critical theorists have been working to dismantle the Renaissance and Enlightenment humanist presumptions about *homo sapiens* that have led to our conceptual estrangement from the matrix of earth's life" (2006, 25). The link between animals and the avant-garde in *Thérèse Raquin* suggests that the novel could be considered a trailblazing piece of visual writing that redirects the focus away from a human perspective. Zola's naturalism, which seeks to explain human behavior through the biological functioning of the organs and nervous system, instinct and genetic determinism, parallels this burgeoning field of study (Zola 1902, 122). I thus integrate contemporary art historical criticism, by Steve Baker and Aloï, regarding the role of animals to disrupt fixed values. Deleuze's studies of Bacon prove to be particularly useful in interpreting Laurent's groundbreaking aesthetic and its ties to animals in Zola's 1867 publication.

It is curious that two masterpieces of French literature, *Thérèse Raquin* and *Manette Salomon*, which focus on a minor artist and his relationship to animals, were published the same year. Both novels capture a particular cultural figure of the 1860s of the "natural modern artist," perhaps initiated by Baudelaire in his aesthetic treatise of *Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863). Baudelaire portrays the modern artist as untaught and naturally gifted, approaching novelty with incredible curiosity, yet is also able to employ the use of artifice to embellish his or her art. "To this profound and joyous curiosity must be attributed the fixed eye, animal-like in its ecstasy, of children in front of something new, whatever it be, face or

landscape, light, guiding, colors, shimmering fabric, enchantments of beauty enhanced by embellishment/*C'est à cette curiosité profonde et joyeuse qu'il faut attribuer l'œil fixe et animalement extatique des enfants devant le nouveau, quel qu'il soit, visage ou paysage, lumière, dorure, couleurs, étoffes chatoyantes, enchantements de la beauté embellie par la toilette*" (Baudelaire 1999, 59). Here, Baudelaire compares the minor artist's eye to both an animal and a child—for whom experiences are novel and exhilarating. "*Animalement*" here means devoid of education or preconditioning and open to new aesthetic possibilities beyond traditional or academic depictions.

Baudelaire's text, as well as those of Zola and the Goncourts, prefigures the genre of impressionism. The painters that perhaps best embodied aesthetic philosophy in the 1860s were Manet and Courbet, both of whom Zola knew and defended in his art criticism. Zola's novel *L'Oeuvre*, written in 1886, portrays the life and ambition of an impressionist painter and pioneer of the avant-garde, partly based on his childhood friend Cézanne. Zola wrote *Thérèse Raquin* two decades prior, before the movement had arrived. *Thérèse Raquin* underscores, but does not resolve, the newfound tensions between nature and the city as well as those between traditional and marginal art. The characters foreshadow early constructs such as the impressionist artist as well as Darwin's theory of the descent of mankind. While Buffon remained a central figure in French natural history, the publication of *The Origin of Species* had radically altered the vision of man's place within the natural world—as well as the artist's role to represent that world. *Thérèse Raquin* represents this transition.

Perplexingly, the only natural scientist mentioned in the novel is Buffon, in the context of Camille's disingenuous studies: "He bought Buffon's works, and every night, he assigned himself the task of reading twenty, thirty pages, despite the boredom that such reading caused him. He believed he was working on his education/*Il avait acheté les œuvres de Buffon, et, chaque soir, il se donnait une tâche de vingt, de trente pages, malgré l'ennui qu'une pareille lecture lui causait; il croyait travailler à son éducation*" (Zola 1953, 34). Buffon's works here do not reflect actual knowledge of animals, but rather the appearance of knowledge of animals, which is part of one's expected general education and bourgeois social standing. Buffon's 36-volume *Histoire naturelle* (published from 1749 to 1804 with eight additional volumes written by his colleague Bernard Germain de Lacépède) was considered as a canonical work of French thought until well into the twentieth century. The volumes received a renewed interest

in the beginning of the nineteenth century due to their highly stylized and lengthy prose, considered outdated by some. However, the French public showed renewed interest in Buffon's work after the publication of *Origin of Species* because it was considered a potential predecessor to evolutionary thought (Kellman 2013, 109). In his fourth volume published in 1753, Buffon initially declared that homologous structures of organized beings indicated common descent, such as a donkey being from the same family as a horse. However, he then negates this idea:

[...] one could equally well say that the ape is of the family of man, that he is a degenerate man, that man and ape have a common origin; that, in fact, all the families, among plants as well as animals, have come from a single stock; and that all animals are descended from a single animal, from which have sprung in the course of time, as a result of progress or of degeneration, all the other races of animals ... But no! It is certain from revelation that all animals have participated equally in the grace of direct creation, and that the first pair of every species issued fully formed from the hands of the Creator. (Buffon in Lovejoy 1911, 555)

Regardless of his actual beliefs, Buffon's writings could not escape the Enlightenment model that God had created all species separately, and they were distinct from mankind, which possessed divine reason. For this reason, Buffon also argues that man is the most noble and superior animal. "The animal is, according to our ways of perceiving, the most complete work of nature, and man is the masterpiece/*L'animal est, selon notre façon d'apercevoir, l'ouvrage le plus complet de la Nature, et l'homme est le chef d'oeuvre*" (Buffon 1785, 6). In *Thérèse Raquin*, Camille assigns himself the grueling chore of reading *Histoire naturelle* every night—its laboriousness emphasized by the words "task/tâche," "boredom/ennui," and "work/travailler"—in order to appear well read and cultured and, thereby, a humanist. His depiction directly contrasts the way in which Laurent and Thérèse are portrayed—as governed by their physical bodies and instincts rather than acquired knowledge.

We will now investigate the ways in which Zola's scientific literature does and does not depart from Buffon's humanist ideology. Revolting from traditional approaches to fiction, Zola proclaims:

In *Thérèse Raquin*, I wanted to study temperaments and not character traits. That is the entire novel. I chose characters that were only dominated by their nerves and their blood, deprived of free will, commanded at each act of their life by the fatality of their flesh. Thérèse and Laurent are brutes, nothing more./

Dans Thérèse Raquin, j'ai voulu étudier des tempéraments et non des caractères. Là est le livre entier. J'ai choisi des personnages souverainement dominés par leurs nerfs et leur sang, dépourvus de libre arbitre, entraînés à chaque acte de leur vie par les fatalités de leur chair. Thérèse et Laurent sont des brutes, rien de plus. (Zola 1953, 8)

At first glance, this final sentence could be seen as dismissive, particularly given the degrading term “brute,” which I will discuss shortly. However, the phrase “nothing more/rien de plus” suggests that nothing else is essential to Zola’s aesthetic other than the working of nerves, blood vessels and flesh—foregoing compassion, sympathy or emotional link. The connection between species occurs on a physiological level. *Thérèse Raquin* was a preliminary experiment, conducted before his *Les Rougon-Macquart* series, in which the characters are linked by hereditary ties. In his analysis of *Thérèse Raquin*, Deleuze illustrates that impulses and temperament take center stage, as opposed to epic themes that are found in his later works like the train in *La Bête humaine* (Deleuze 2015, 331).

As the father of naturalism, Zola elucidates the movement’s objective as applying the experimental method to fiction, just as Bernard applied it medicine in *l’Introduction à l’étude de la médecine expérimentale*, published only two years before *Thérèse Raquin*. In *Le Roman expérimental*, Zola writes, “I myself am going to attempt to prove that the experimental method applied to the knowledge of physical life can also be applied to passionate and intellectual life/*Je vais tâcher de prouver à mon tour que, si la méthode expérimentale conduit à la connaissance de la vie physique, elle doit conduire aussi à la connaissance de la vie passionnelle et intellectuelle*” (Zola 1902, 2). Replacing the word “doctor” with the word “novelist,” Zola suggests that the observer should study physical sensations, record external phenomena with exactitude and then interpret the results (Zola 1902, 6). Ultimately, in his analysis of bodily functions, instinct and temperament, the writer’s goal is to search for the elements common to human and nonhuman species alike that exist within mankind.

Seeking the shared aspects between animality and humanity is the cornerstone of the naturalist aesthetic and is a foundation of the art of modernity. In his autopsy of urban figures, Zola’s pen functions as a scalpel to remove the veneer of social falsities and edification. In his preface of *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola writes:

In a word, I had but one desire, take a powerful man and an untamed woman, search for the animal in them, nothing but the animal, throw them in a violent drama and scrupulously note the sensations and the acts of these beings. I simply did to two living bodies the same analytical work that surgeons do to cadavers./

En un mot, je n'ai eu qu'un désir: étant donné un homme puissant et une femme inassouvie, chercher en eux la bête, ne voir même que la bête, les jeter dans un drame violent et noter scrupuleusement les sensations et les actes de ses êtres. J'ai simplement fait sur deux corps vivants le travail analytique que les chirurgiens font sur des cadavres. (Zola 1953, 9)

According to Zola, the modern writer is both zookeeper and pathologist—observing human animals within their societal cages and then dissecting their living corpses. His revolutionary writing, now celebrated today, shocked and appalled critics in the nineteenth century. Zola's novels overturn novelistic convention by replacing sentiment with sensation and privileging instinct over intellect.

On the one hand, naturalism is subversive because it undermines anthropocentric assumptions of human superiority by illustrating that humans are like all other animals. On the other, by singularizing “la bête,” Zola attributes a fixed essence to all nonhuman species, which denies their uniqueness or individuality. Derrida writes, “Whenever ‘one’ says ‘The Animal,’ each time a philosopher or anyone else says ‘The Animal,’ in the singular and without further ado, claiming thus to designate every living thing that is held not to be human (man as *rational animal*, man as political animal, speaking animal, [...] he utters an asininity [bêtise]” (2008, 31). The description of man as a rational, political or speaking animal still implies human exceptionalism. Derrida often plays with the term “bête” (meaning both animal and stupid in French), declaring that the use of the word, which has little concrete meaning, is itself idiotic. Taking into account Derrida’s notion and the prolific use of the word “bête” in French literature, Matthias Preuss and Sebastian Schönbeck, literary scholars, have proposed the establishment of “bête studies,” meaning “difficulty that is involved whenever we think, speak or write about animals, a difficulty that cannot be avoided by replacing the singular with the corresponding plural” (2015, 252). More broadly, “bête studies” suggests the discovery of the limitations of human knowledge. In the words of Flaubert, “*Stupidity consists of wanting to conclude/ Oui, la bêtise consiste à vouloir conclure*” (Bovard et Pécuchet 1904, 680).

“*Chercher ... la bête*” is naturalism’s quest, no matter how flawed or futile it may be, to seek within the human body that which is not governed by reason. It is the admiration of the physical system of the body, including properties that are shared among other species within the same kingdom.

In *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola describes the life of a bohemian artist as an existence that could be lived by nonhuman animals:

The world of brutal pleasures left him with sizzling needs of the flesh. He found, however, ease in his particular profession. He lived very well as a brute; he liked this work from day to day, that which did not tire him or wear out his spirit. Two things irritated him only: he lacked women, and food from restaurants at eighteen bucks did not appease the glutinous appetites of his stomach./

Ce monde de jouissances brutales lui laissa de cuisants besoins de chairs. Il se trouva cependant à l'aise dans son métier d'employé; il vivait très bien en brute, il aimait cette besogne au jour le jour, qui ne le fatiguait pas et qui endormait son esprit. Deux choses l'irritaient seulement: il manquait de femmes, et la nourriture des restaurants à dix-huit sous n'apaisait pas les appétits gloutons de son estomac. (1953, 61)

For Zola, “brute” implies one who is dominated by the instinctive need for sleep, food and copulation, which an artistic lifestyle would supposedly permit if not for lack of money. Laurent is, in all likelihood, an ironic portrayal of the artist that mirrors the contemporary art criticism of innovative painters such as Manet (Lethbridge 1980, 295). Critics met Manet’s paintings with scorn and one proclaimed upon viewing *Olympia* that she was badly drawn and “does not have a human form” (Clark 1984, 92). At the same time, Laurent could represent the avant-gardist who offends the bourgeois public through “brutish” depictions of humanity. Laurent’s supposedly burning needs of the flesh illustrate Zola’s naturalist view of his characters that do not use reason to overcome their impulses, a tendency that violates Buffon’s hierarchy, which places human reason at the very top. Buffon writes, “The most stupid man is able to manage the most acute animal; he governs it, and renders it subservient to his purposes; and this, not so much on the account of his strength or skill as by the superiority of his nature, and from his being possessed of reason, which enables him to form a rational system of action and method, by which he compels the animals to obey him” (Buffon 1797, 327).

For Buffon, what distinguishes human from animal, independent of species, is the ability to use reason and methodical thought to dominate all other creatures. He concludes, “It follows then, that they [nonhuman animals] must all be considered one nature, and the nature of man is not only highly superior to that of the brute, but also entirely different from it” (Buffon 1797, 328). Buffon’s use of “brute” is a catch-all term, which includes all forms of life that do not possess the so-called reasoning faculties. However, ultimately, “brute” refers to those who do not exercise dominance. In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida questions such terminology, arguing that the demarcation between human and beast has more to do with structures of power than any biological delineation (Krell 2013). Interestingly, while Buffon believes that men are superior to animals due to reason, he also indicates that they are, in turn, the most destructive species. He asks the question, “If to harm is to destroy animate creatures, considering man’s place in the general system of beings, isn’t he the most harmful of all? *Si nuire est détruire des êtres animés, l’homme considéré comme faisant partie du système général de ces êtres, n’est-il pas l’espèce la plus nuisible de toutes?*” (Buffon 1758, 74).

For Zola, Darwinian evolution represented a possible shift in power dynamics, not only between humans and animals but also between the bourgeois and working classes. Although Darwin is not mentioned explicitly by name in his novels until the 1880s, the battle between a bourgeois bureaucrat and a bohemian artist in *Thérèse Raquin* foreshadows similar themes discussed in *Germinale* (1885). Zola writes, “Etienne, was now at Darwin. He had read fragments, summarized and popularized in a five-buck volume; and, from his badly understood reading, he got the revolutionary idea for the struggle for existence, the eating the rich, the people devouring the pale bourgeoisie/ *Etienne, maintenant, en était à Darwin. Il en avait lu des fragments, résumés et vulgarisés dans un volume à cinq sous; et, de cette lecture mal comprise, il se faisait une idée révolutionnaire du combat pour l’existence, les maigres mangeant les gras, le peuple fort dévorant la blême bourgeoisie*” (Zola 2018, 333). Even though Zola acknowledges that this understanding of Darwin is misunderstood, his novels incorporate popularized ideas of evolutionary theory, which attempt to apply general scientific principles to the contemporary social order. Louise Lyle, a literary scholar, writes that in his mission to fight for justice, Zola resists the notion of scientific exclusivity and thus proposes a reversed social Darwinism where the weakest classes overtake the strong (2008, 305). The bourgeoisie is portrayed as an aging and dying species, which will be

devoured by the people to form a new society. Although *Thérèse Raquin* offers no prospect of a social utopia and no direct reference to Darwin, it does feature a fight between two characters, of varying social statuses, for survival and reproduction. In addition to a class struggle, the battle between Camille and Laurent is an ideological and aesthetic one.

3.1 THE BOURGEOIS AND THE BULL

In sum, whereas Camille understands men as *like* animals, Laurent *is* an animal. The petit bourgeois maintains the division between humans and nonhumans and believes that the former dominates the latter. His interest in Buffon, the former director of the Jardin des Plantes, then the Jardin du Roi, indicates an underlying belief that animals should be caged. Camille's trip to view the Jardin's menagerie animals reflects the viewpoint that city dwellers and fauna should be mediated through the bars of the zoo: "He used to remain there for half an hour, leaning over the pit, following the bears' gaze with their heavy movements/*Il restait là une demi-heure, penché au-dessus de la fosse, suivant du regard les ours qui se dandinaient lourdement*" (Zola 1953, 33). He wavers above "*au dessus de la fosse*" and apart from the bears, and examines their physique and movements. The bear pit was created in 1805, but was removed in the 1950s due to ethical reasons. As Jacques Rigoulet, director of the menagerie remarks, people no longer wanted to see animals from above but from the same level (Damecour 2004, np). "*Au dessus de la fosse*" (pit or grave) also foreshadows Camille's eventual death and return from the grave as a ghost as an eternal reminder of Laurent and Thérèse's violation of the social order.

Laurent, by contrast, is "a true son of a peasant/*un vrai fils du paysan*" with enormous hands and a fist large enough to stun an ox (Zola 1953, 42). "And Thérèse examined him with curiosity, going from his fists to his face, experiencing little shivers when her eye met his bull-like neck. Camille spread out his volumes of Buffon and his dime novels to show his friend that he worked hard too./*Et Thérèse l'examinait avec curiosité, allant de ses poings à sa face, éprouvant de petits frissons lorsque ses yeux rencontraient son cou de taureau. Camille étala ses volumes de Buffon et ses livraisons à dix centimes, pour montrer à son ami qu'il travaillait, lui aussi*" (Zola 1953, 43). The novel's juxtaposition of Camille and Laurent illustrates two diametrically opposed yet interdependent facets of French society: the petit bourgeois and the artist-animal. Zola employs an enumeration of body parts to describe Laurent (his fists, his

face) as well as a comparison to a bull (his bull-like neck), emphasizing his existence on a corporal level, which provokes a physical response in his mate (little shivers). In the description of Camille, the monetary value of his books is mentioned, suggesting that his quest for knowledge is merely a bourgeois value. Zola mocks Camille's study of Buffon as merely a means of boastfully illustrating his culture and education, which lacks a true understanding of other species or even Laurent's own interests.

In contrast, resembling the animals that Buffon observed, Laurent is supposedly a wild beast that operates purely by instinct and bodily drives. One could compare Laurent's description to Buffon's observation of a bull: "In stature the bull equals the horse, but he is much stronger made in all parts of his body, particularly around the neck and the head; his horns are thick and large, and when enraged, he gores and tosses both man and beast" (Buffon 1833, 257–258). A brawny, violent creature, Laurent "appears entirely as a metaphor for animal strength, he dwells, in the chain of beings, next to the bull and the stud horse, the animal, is right there/*apparaît tout entier comme une métaphore de la puissance animale; il se loge, dans la chaîne des êtres, tout à côté du taureau et de l'étalon; la bête, là encore est toute proche*" (Mitterand 1970, 23). However, I assert that there is nothing metaphorical concerning this connection—that Zola highlights the physiological link between Laurent and other species.

The two characters point out the difference between *understanding* animals on an intellectual level and *becoming* animals on a physical level. We could thus compare Zola's literary project to Pick's approach to literary analysis: "Instead of interrogating and expanding the possibilities of (nonhuman) subjectivity, I propose to explore the regions deemed animal (or even vegetative) that lurk within the human itself" (2011, 6). Zola's analysis of Laurent is an exploration of a "human animal." Camille's character, by contrast, lives according to the laws of men, believing that he can only encounter animals in the zoo or in Buffon's writings, rather than in his own home.

As an eighteenth-century naturalist who pioneered modern natural science but also refuted the possibility of evolution, Buffon had an ambivalent status in mid-nineteenth-century literature. The scientist revolutionized Western thought by presenting the value of nature, in all its complexity and splendor, as a legitimate object of study. However, natural science also created a dividing line between humans and all other forms of life. His work is considered a predecessor to evolutionary theory by reforming categories of species, noting the influence of external factors such as climate on the functioning of animals and arguing that animals do degenerate

within the same species in their lifetime (Varloot and d'Herault 1984, 17). In contrast, he argued that species are not mutable—an idea that was later contested by Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, whose findings supported the notion of common descent. Laurent reveals a post-evolutionary ethos, which obscures the boundaries between human and animal.

In addition to signifying the opposition between conservativist and evolutionary science in the Second Empire, Camille and Laurent also represent the contrast between city and suburban life. In *Thérèse Raquin*, the outskirts of Paris serve as an imaginary passage to a prehistoric jungle, where only the fittest survive. Unprotected by the rules and comforts of civilization, humans are forced to live by their instincts. In contrast, in Paris, Camille enjoys dragging Thérèse across the sidewalks of the Champs-Elysées, to her chagrin.

But Camille would have his way; he liked to show his wife about; whenever he met any of the clerks from the office, particularly any of his superiors, he was delighted to be able, in the company of 'madame' to exchange a greeting with them. Besides, he was accustomed to walking for walking's sake, hardly speaking a word, stiff and awkward in his Sunday clothes, dragging one foot after another, boorish and conceited./

Mais Camille tenait bon; il aimait à montrer sa femme; lorsqu'il rencontrait un de ses collègues, un de ses chefs surtout, il était tout fier d'échanger un salut avec lui, en compagnie de madame. D'ailleurs, il marchait pour marcher, sans presque parler, roide et contrefait dans ses habits du dimanche, traînant les pieds, abruti et vaniteux. (Zola 1953, 86; 1992, 79)

For Camille, a promenade in the city serves to elevate his status in his profession and in the community. Camille's interaction takes place within a capitalistic system of exchange. However, dragging his feet in silence, he is portrayed as physically weak ("roide et contrefait"). The latter word means deformed, but also counterfeit—perhaps implying that Camille's position in society is false, a weak animal ("abruti") covered in his Sunday finest.

In Camille's degeneration from a respectable middle-class man in Paris to a hunted quarry in Saint-Ouen, this chapter exemplifies Darwin's principle of "survival of the fittest." This term was used by Herbert's Spencer in his review of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (144). Darwin reappropriated the phrase in his 1869 edition, explaining that it meant "better designed for an immediate, local environment" (in Gould 1977, 45). In Camille's urban environment, his pretension and willingness to play social games makes him

highly adaptable. In the wild, Camille's sickly and weak body would make it difficult for him to fend off predators. Because Camille is better suited for his Parisian habitat, Laurent and Thérèse must lure him to the woods, where Laurent may kill him with sheer physical force. Laurent thus embodies the principles of both natural selection and sexual selection in his ability to attract a mate and eliminate his competition. Darwin writes, "I can see no good reason to doubt that female birds, by selecting, during thousands of generations, the most melodious or beautiful males, according to their standard of beauty, might produce a marked effect" (2010, 175). Both Darwin and Zola link this principle to the appreciation of physical beauty—a trait shared by humans and animals.

It is in these outskirts of Saint-Ouen where Zola paints his literary masterpiece, connecting brutal wildlife with stunning visual imagery. Like *Manette Salomon*, this chapter on nature exhibits impressionistic writing, even before the impressionist movement had officially begun. Zola writes of the painters Manet, Renoir and Cézanne: "I translated them into literature, by the strokes, the notes, the colorations by the palette of many of my descriptions/*Je les ai traduits en littérature, par les touches, notes, colorations par la palette de beaucoup de mes descriptions*" (in Lethbridge 1980, 278). These painters taught Zola to alternate between warm and cool colors and break down light and colors into fragments (Mitterand 1970, 33). Henri Mitterand, Reff, Lethbridge and François-Marie Mourad have noted the similarities between this scene and the paintings of Renoir, Manet, Pissarro and Courbet, who were painting landscapes that aimed to emphasize the physical rather than psychological (Kelder 1980, 16). Dissatisfied with Paris' public gardens "the group of young artists moved into rural suburbs, or more distant villages. There, in their images of the Seine and the adjacent landscape, they gradually eliminated all human references in order to concentrate on the seemingly inexhaustible variety of atmospheric effects produced by the volatile climate" (Kelder 1980, 17).

In portraying modern subjects enjoying a day of leisure outside the city, *Thérèse Raquin* and paintings of this period alike mediate the tensions between wilderness and civilization. Citizens can shed their refined garb and bask in the sun, surrounded by leaves and soil. For example, Courbet's *Les Demoiselles des bords de la Seine* (1857), features two women lying on the riverbank, surrounded by trees to the upper left. The trees, the river and the women's skin are painted in a flat manner, indicating a unity among them. In contrast, the folds and lace of the first woman's dress are painted with tremendous detail as she lies on a pile of branches. Similarly, in *Thérèse Raquin*:

Therese had subsided among the leaves with a great rustling of skirts; she was almost hidden by the folds of her dress which were billowing about her, and displaying one of her legs as high as the knee./

Thérèse, avec un grand bruit de jupes froissées, venait de se jeter sur les feuilles; elle disparaissait à moitié au milieu des plis de sa robe qui se relevait autour d'elle, en découvrant une de ses jambes jusqu'au genou. (Zola 1953, 87–88; 1992, 75)

The forest partially undresses Thérèse, exposing her flesh. Another painting to which *Thérèse Raquin* is sometimes compared, Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863), freezes two men in a discussion with a nude woman in the countryside. She has articles of clothing strewn to the left—including a straw hat with a bow and a blue dress. Once the subjects of Manet's and Courbet's paintings leave modern civilization, they become partially disrobed of their social codes and cues. Inside the countryside, the nude woman in *Déjeuner* could be returning to a “primal” state, casting her civilized clothing aside. The paintings' detailed attention to the subjects' clothing reinforces Baudelaire's creed that the painting of modernity must express the gestures and fashion of one's time (detailing “every time one adjusts, crumples or stiffens his clothing, rounds or aligns his gesture/*tout son ajustement, chiffonne ou raidit son habit, arrondit ou aligne son geste*”) and place, while still illustrating the eternal qualities of nature.

The primary difference between *Thérèse Raquin* and these paintings is that this dichotomy is made much more explicit in the narrative, and nature is coded not only as an escape but also a site that triggers deadly instincts. While the proto-impressionist paintings of the Parisian *banlieue* illustrate a relaxing day outside the city limits, Zola's narrative suggests that murderous impulses lie at the heart of man. Saint-Ouen supposedly unleashes this dormant, killing instinct—driving the characters to eat or be eaten. In addition to the Baudelairian combination of the eternal and the transitory, Zola's aesthetic of modernity is one of crude violence. The medium of the novel exposes the hidden brutality that may be imperceptible in a beautiful artistic portrayal of nature. This idea is apparent in *The Origin of Species*: “We see beautiful adaptations everywhere and in every part of the organic world. For instance, we may notice beauty in the humblest parasite which clings to the hairs of a quadruped or feathers of a bird; in the structure of the beetle which dives through the water; in the plumed seed which is wafted by the gentlest breeze” (Darwin 2010, 144).

However, according to Darwin, this seemingly serene and tranquil universe is driven by competition, destruction and the battle for existence. This universal struggle for life is rarely acknowledged and often misunderstood. Distracted by the beautiful plumage of birds and their charming songs, we may not take note of the violence that may occur. “We behold the face of nature bright with gladness, we often see superabundance of food [...] we forget how largely these songsters, or their eggs, or their nestlings are destroyed by birds and beasts of prey” (Darwin 2010, 186). While these paintings of Courbet and Manet might, in some ways, present “the face of nature bright with gladness,” *Thérèse Raquin* reveals an assassin lurking within the woods.

Burnt up by the hot glare of summer, the whole countryside feels the impending death of its beauty in every cold wind. And, in the breeze, you can hear piteous sighs of despair. Then night descends from on high with its shroud-laden shadow./

La campagne, brûlée par les rayons ardents de l'été, sent la mort venir avec les premiers vents froids. Et il y a, dans les cieux, des souffles plaintifs de la désespérance. La nuit descend de haut, apportant des linceuls dans son ombre.
(Zola 1953, 94)

Even after a sunny day, trees may shed their leaves, and cold, howling winds may approach in the darkness of night. Such a macabre vision of the woodsy ramparts differs dramatically from Camille’s ideal construct of nature, which he believes should be controlled and regulated. Echoing the three subjects in *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*, Laurent stares at Thérèse’s exposed leg and listens to Camille “who was grumbling at the Government for not turning all the islands of the Seine into pleasure-gardens, with seats, and graveled walks, and clipped trees, the same as at the Tuilleries/*se fâchait contre le gouvernement, en déclarant qu’on devrait changer tous les îlots de la Seine en jardins anglais, avec des bancs, des allées sablées, des arbres taillés, comme aux Tuilleries*” (Zola 1953, 88; 1992, 75–76). Benches, sandy paths and trimmed trees are all impositions of civilization onto the environment. Camille’s belief that wildlife should be manicured and transformed into public parks echoes the bourgeois mentality during the Haussmann era. During Napoleon III’s reign, Haussmann, with the help of gardener Jean-Pierre Barillet-Deschamps, created the Bois de Boulogne, Parc des Buttes-Chaumont, Parc Montsouris and Bois de Vincennes, many of which were equipped with artificial lakes, waterfalls and grottos

(de Moncan 2007, 107–109). The parks were modeled after those in London. The English garden was meant to be an idealized version of nature, a departure from the geometric French garden of the seventeenth century, featuring stretches of grass, curved lakes and groups of trees, and temples. This setting, ironically, is meant to look more natural than nature through the help of man. The supposedly savage, untrammeled countryside, however, is associated with violence, fear and death.

Masked as a pleasant boat ride along the Seine, Laurent attacks the unsuspecting Camille and drowns him:

He could not make it out; a vague terror came over him. He would have screamed, but he felt a rough hand at his throat. With the instinct of an animal on the defensive, he got on to his knees and clutched at the boat's gunwale. In this position, he carried on the struggle for a few seconds./

Il ne comprit pas; une épouvrante vague le saisit. Il voulut crier, et sentit une main rude qui le serrait à la gorge. Avec l'instinct d'une bête qui se défend, il se dressa sur les genoux, se cramponnant au bord de la barque. Il lutta ainsi pendant quelques secondes. (Zola 1992, 83; 1953, 95)

Unable to intellectually understand the situation, Camille's turns to the instinct of self-defense. The term “*lutta*” suggests the Darwinian struggle for life though Camille is not strong enough to escape Laurent's powerful hand—the instrument of both violent killing and portraiture.

3.2 PAINTING WITH MUD

If Laurent represents a deadly creature stripped of the veneer of civilization, what is the connection between his “animal” status and his role as an artist? Zola's famous formula for modern art, articulated in the Salon of 1866, was to paint nature through a particular temperament. This vision was highly influenced by Hippolyte Taine's *Philosophy of Art* (1865), which argued that artists, like other living organisms, are products of their environment. Art critics, thus, must observe their work like a natural scientist (Gamwell 2002, 64). As an art critic himself as well as a novelist writing about art, Zola treats his subjects as if they were animals and he is the scientific observer. In his commentary on *Thérèse Raquin*, Mitterand writes that Naturalism reveals the authentic, somatic functioning of the body without artifice. “There is something inhuman in the spectacle of digestive flesh/*Il y a quelque chose d'inhumain dans le spectacle de cette*

chaire digérante (1970, 23). According to the critic, Naturalism is “inhuman” because it deemphasizes education and places the focus on physical instinct rather than human reason or edification. Zola writes, “Let schools die if the teachers stay with us/*Meurent les écoles, si les maîtres nous restent/*” (Zola 1879, 72). The author expresses his loathing for traditional institutions because they arrest creativity. According to Zola, true art comes from the bodily senses. In *L’Oeuvre*, Zola declares:

Thought is the product of the entire body. Think about the brain alone. See what happens to the nobility of the brain, when the stomach is upset! [...] Ah! The formula is here, our modern revolution does not have another base, it is the fatal death of the ancient society, it is the birth of a new society, and it is necessarily the push of a new art./

La pensée est le produit du corps entier. Faites donc penser un cerveau tout seul, voyez donc ce que devient la noblesse du cerveau, quand le ventre est malade ! [...] ... Ah ! la formule est là, notre révolution moderne n'a pas d'autre base, c'est la mort fatale de l'antique société, c'est la naissance d'une société nouvelle, et c'est nécessairement la poussée d'un nouvel art. (Zola 2006, 191)

By 1886, the fictional leader of the impressionist movement had articulated “the formula” for their “modern revolution.” The artist denies the Cartesian notion of the split between the mind and body and the belief that the former dominates the latter. He explains that understanding how the body functions as an integral unit is essential to a new art which will shatter tradition and will aid in developing a new society. However, as previously mentioned, *Thérèse Raquin* was written before both impressionism and Darwinism were established movements, and the avant-gardist had little social standing.

In the beginning of the novel, Zola portrays Laurent as lazy and lacking talent. “His farmer’s eye saw nature in a gauche and dirty manner. His paintings—muddy, badly constructed and grimacing—defied all criticism/*Son oeil de paysan voyait gauchement et salement la nature; ses toiles, boueuses, mal bâties, grimaçantes, défaient toute critique*” (Zola 1953, 45).

A series of muddled splotches in a variety of colors spread across the canvas, Laurent’s initial painting could be labeled as “proto-impressionist.” The references to dirt and peasantry could bring to mind Courbet’s *Enterrement à Ornans* (1849–1850). In the painting, peasants and clergymen, created in muted, muddled colors, surround a grave in the countryside. Considered “vulgar” and “scandalous,” this democratic work of art helped launch a new

genre of art that revolted against academic and aristocratic traditions. Champfleury writes: “It is an incredibly audacious act, it is the subversion of all institutions associated with the jury, it is a direct appeal to the public, some are saying it is freedom. It is a scandal, it is anarchy, it is art dragged through the mud. [...] A man from Ornans, a peasant in his coffin, dares to draw a large crowd at his funeral: farmers, people of low estate...” (“Reception of Courbet’s Work” 2007, np). Courbet “drags art through the mud,” both literally and figuratively. By placing a hole in the dirt at the very center of his painting, he symbolically buried traditional artistic subjects and elevates rural peasants to the status of mythical creatures. Finished one year after the Revolution of 1848, the painting illustrates the power of peasants who cultivate the land. The countryside, with its fields of fertile soil, wild plants and roaming animals, became a symbol of revolution and the avant-garde. As we will later see in Laforgue’s work, which argues that the impressionists’ eyes are physiologically different from those of academics, Zola portrays Laurent’s eyes—tied to animals as a farmer’s son—as seeing differently from other people, creating an awkward initial portrait of Camille (Zola 1953, 50):

He dotted the canvas with thin, dirty spots, then he made short cross-hatches, close together, like pencil shading. At the end of each session, Madame Raquin and Camille went into ecstasies. Laurent said they must be patient, that the resemblance would come later./

Il pointillait la toile de minces taches sales, il faisait des hachures courtes et serrées, comme s'il se fut servi d'un crayon. À la fin de chaque séance, madame Raquin et Camille s'extasiaient. Laurent disait qu'il fallait attendre, que la ressemblance allait venir. (Zola, Thérèse Raquin 43, 51)

This last sentence operates on multiple levels. On the one hand, Laurent foreshadows Camille’s apparition in all of his future works. On another, as Mourad argues, Zola affirms that untrained avant-garde artists, with hard work and dedication, will be able to paint well. The author is alluding to a revolutionary art of the future that is only in its embryonic stages. Emulating Manet, Laurent paints in a series of dabs or “*taches*,” which creates images that are distinct yet nebulous. In her analysis of the “*tache*” in nineteenth-century art history, Øystein Sjåstad discusses Zola’s emphasis on the Manet “dab.” “The *tache* is seen here as the real way to see the world—it has everything to do with perception, an objective or an experimental, scientific, naturalistic and positivistic way of recording the world—in colored spots [...] Zola created a myth about the artist, whose role was that of a temperament recording reality in *taches*” (Sjåstad 2014, 10).

While Laurent appears to be a terrible artist, interestingly, Zola uses very similar words to describe Laurent's painting and the negative reception of his own novel. In the preface, he writes, "Criticism has received this book with a brutal and indignant outcry. Certain virtuous individuals, in newspapers equally virtuous, have made a grimace of disgust as they took it up with tongs to throw in the fire/*La critique a accueilli ce livre d'une voix brutale et indignée. Certains gens vertueux, dans des journaux non moins vertueux, ont fait une grimace de dégoût, en le prenant avec des pincettes pour le jeter au feu*" (Zola 1953, 6; 1992, 5). Laurent, as the embodiment of Zola's aesthetic of shock and disgust, as well as the literary incarnation of Courbet's radical peasantry, could be perceived as a revolutionary figure. However, as a creature of the Second Empire, Laurent is not portrayed as an ambitious avant-garde painter who seeks to undermine the artistic establishment. Instead, he is described as a lazy opportunist who is only preoccupied with food, drink, women, sleep and other basic necessities. Pretending to go to law school, Laurent takes his father's money and attends art school instead. "It amused me. The profession is funny, not tiring. We smoke. We joke around all day/*Cela m'amusait; le métier est drôle, pas fatigant. Nous fumions, nous blaguions tout le jour*" (Zola 1953, 44). At the same time, operating with little training or skill, Laurent can be seen as an emerging cultural figure that exemplifies a shift away from the classical, academic values of reason and education that define both humanism and the human species.

Given Laurent's ambivalent portrayal, I ask whether it is possible to find connections between *Thérèse Raquin* and contemporary theory regarding animals and groundbreaking art. Does Laurent's supposed "animality" make him a revolutionary or subversive figure? Far beyond undermining classical notions of art, does the aesthetic proposed in *Thérèse Raquin* cause us to reevaluate our assumptions of creativity being uniquely human? In some ways, Laurent defies the idea that in the domain of art, in the words of Alois, "men are seen as 'world forming' and therefore capable of creating art out of what the animal clumsily makes" (2011, xix). It is possible that Zola's aesthetic shares some values with contemporary art.

Baker highlights the ubiquity of animals in art of the past few decades, arguing that such a subject is emblematic of the postmodern condition. In *The Postmodern Animal* (2000), Baker writes that animal art of the end of the twentieth century, characterized by "botched taxidermy," destabilizes fixed values and human-centered assumptions. Whether it includes live,

dead or representational creatures, contemporary animal art blurs the boundaries between human and animal as well as those between spectator, artist and subject matter. “Because the *look* of the postmodern animal—no surprises there—seems more likely to be that of a fractured, awkward, ‘wrong’ or wronged thing, which is hard not to be read as a means of addressing what it means to be human now” (Baker 2000, 54). Animal art reflects the fragmented and indefinable quality of human existence in the present era.

While it is difficult to compare contemporary installations of actual carcasses to literary representations of artists and faunae in the nineteenth century, I believe that one can find moments in these texts where animals undermine concrete categories of meaning, even if to be rebuilt again. Baker contests that modernity focused on animals. However, he does claim that the nineteenth century gave birth to the cliché of the marginalized artist, a “romantic conception of the artist as being apart: an outsider, rejecting the pettiness of bourgeois culture, closer to the authenticity of the animal world. Flaubert writes in 1850: ‘the artist, to my way of thinking, is a monstrosity, something outside nature ... I am resigned to living as I have lived: alone ... a bear, with my bear-rug for company’” (Baker 2000, 31). Whether in the nineteenth century or today, the association between innovative writers and artists and animals (as Baker describes “Flau-bear”) undermines notions of human superiority. In some ways, a critical reading of *Thérèse Raquin* teaches us, as Aloï expresses in his readings of contemporary animal art, to “unlearn” the animal: deconstruct assumptions about our relationship to nature and create new modes of understanding interactions amongst species and ecosystems (Aloï 2011, xvi).

Forerunners of contemporary animal theory, Deleuze and Guattari stress that animals are synonymous with both transformations and multiplicity, escaping fixed identities or unified meaning. The philosophers seek to debunk structural, scientific and linguistic categories, which present information in stagnant and fixed categories that are based on comparison and difference. Just as pre-evolutionary natural science compared categories but did not conceive of one becoming another (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 286), linguistically, “A man could never say, ‘I am a bull, a wolf...’ but he could say, ‘I am to a woman what a bull is to a cow’/‘*Jamais un homme n'a pu dire: 'Je suis un taureau, un loup ...', mais il a pu dire: je suis à la femme ce que le taureau est à une vache*’” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 289). Such analogical thinking makes our universe

seem more orderly and rational, but it stifles the imagination and inhibits identification with nonhuman species. Deleuze and Guattari instead elucidate the possibility of metamorphosis, and they stress the often imperceptible connection between humans and animals, particularly in revolutionary works of art and literature.

According to the theorists, animals are a subversive force “that undermines the great molar powers of family, profession and conjugality/*qui mine les grandes puissances molaires, famille, profession*” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 285). “Becoming animal” undermines social institutions and presents an alternative undercurrent that destroys what we perceive as meaningful. As a hypersexual creature that obliterates an arranged marriage and bourgeois family, Laurent embodies this spirit. Laurent unleashes Thérèse’s unbridled lust and alters her nervous system. Whereas she did not even blush around Camille, “The bubbly nature of this boy, his voice full, his laugh loud, the harsh and powerful scents escaping from his body, troubled the young woman and threw her into a sort of nervous anguish/*La nature sanguine de ce garçon, sa voix pleine, ses rires gras, les senteurs acrés et puissants qui s'échappaient de sa personne, troublaient la jeune femme et lajetaient dans une sorte d'angoisse nerveuse*” (Zola 1953, 47). Described in terms of powerful sensory activity, “*voix*,” “*rires*” and “*senteurs*,” coupled with his sanguine nature, Laurent is a disturbing presence that threatens the order and security of this middle-class union. The art that Zola affirms is thus one of bodily expression—common to all species of animals—which may threaten the majoritarian institutions of marriage and family, as well as the general social order. In contrast, as the embodiment of a singular supposed “animal nature”—“Thérèse et Laurent are human brutes, nothing more/*Thérèse et Laurent sont des brutes humaines, rien de plus*” (Zola 1953, 8)—the characters escape the Deleuzian fluidity of “becoming” and have a fixed and defined essence.

3.3 THE NATURALIST PROJECT

On the other hand, in *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola portrays the bohemian artist as having the ability to modify body chemistry and produce unseemly physical reactions. Such a process, as Deleuze suggests, is vital to the revolutionary painting of “sensation,” which is the opposite of what is customary or commonplace or even “sensational.” “Sensation has one face turned toward the subject (the nervous system, vital movement, ‘instinct,’ ‘temperament’—a whole vocabulary common to both Naturalism and Cézanne) and one face

turned toward the object (the ‘fact,’ the place, the event)” (Deleuze 2002, 34). Deleuze proposes that innovative art is both created and received through the physical functioning of the body. “Color is in the body, sensation is in the body and not in the air” (Deleuze 2002, 35). Such a process is not rationally minded but often shocking, violent and brutish. Bodily sensation shatters academic pretense and civilizing institutions, and only the somatic functioning of the body remains. “Our analysis will always remain cruel because our analysis reaches until the end of the human cadaver. At the top, at the bottom, we come up against the brute/*Notre analyse reste toujours cruelle, parce que notre analyse va jusqu’au fond du cadavre humain. En haut, en bas, nous nous heurtons à la brute*” (Zola 1902, 267–268). It is again important not to confound the ever-fluctuating process of becoming animal, as defined by Deleuze, and the fixed and offensive mythical nineteenth-century category of the “brute,” man devoid of reason or culture, as described by Zola.

At the same time, Zola’s art dissects the human form and diminishes it to flesh. In this sense, Zola’s process is similar to that of the twentieth-century painter, Bacon, who disfigures and displays man as meat (Nettleton 2017, 92). Susan Harrow has also suggested this parallel (2007, 105). Zola, the scientist, dissects cadavers. Bacon, the butcher, severs corpses. Deleuze discusses Bacon’s disfigurement of subjects during which they appear as meat—reaching the very essence of humanity/animality, their zone of proximity. “The painter is certainly a butcher, but he goes to the butcher shop as if it were a church, with the meat as the crucified victim (*The Painting of 1946* [3])” (Deleuze 2002, 23–24). Killing ties us to other species, and the artist is an assassin who exposes this truth. In *The Painting of 1946*, Bacon originally attempted to paint a chimpanzee, which later morphed into a bird. A large carcass hangs across the middle of the canvas in the shape of a cross. Flesh, bones and a spinal cord melt together in a pink, cream and black stream. A man with sharp teeth is shrouded in black clothing, which merges with the carcass. Bacon portrays the man as morphing with flesh, creating an overlap between him and nonhuman species. As the painter was fascinated with butcher shops, Deleuze describes Bacon as a butcher that feels an affinity with animals but whose livelihood depends on killing them.

Similarly, in Zola’s novel, Laurent is a murderer who both loathes and feels sorry for his victim: “Look what did. It’s wretched/*Voilà ce que j’en ai fait. Il est ignoble*” (Zola 1953, 114). At the same time, Laurent’s initial painting of Camille in the beginning of the novel already portrays him as cadaver-like. “The portrait was wretched, the prevailing tint dirty grey,

with large purple blotches. Laurent could not use the most brilliant colors without rendering them dingy and muddy/*Le portrait était ignoble, d'un gris sale, avec de larges plaques violacées. Laurent ne pouvait employer les couleurs éclatantes sans les rendre ternes et boueuses*” (Zola 1953, 53; 1992, 45). Zola argues in *Le Roman expérimental* that writers should expose the “brutish body” of a human being (Zola 1953, 3). We see this idea in Laurent’s painting, underscored by the word “ignoble”—which refers both to Laurent’s art and gruesome act of violence. In reducing this bureaucrat to a muddled pool of gruesome colors and awkward lines, Laurent has already assassinated Camille’s bourgeois status.

Later, at the morgue, Camille’s decomposing body mirrors his painting: “The skin had only taken a yellow and muddy tint. The thin, bony, slightly puffy head, grimaced; He bent down a bit, his hair glued to his temples, his eyelids lifted up, showing his pale eyeballs/*La peau avait seulement prise une teinte jaunâtre et boueuse. La tête, maigre, osseuse, légèrement tuméfiée grimaçait; elle se penchait un peu, les cheveux collés aux tempes, les paupières levées, montrant le globe blasé des yeux*” (Zola 1953, 113). With the precision of a surgeon, Zola observes and dismembers Camille’s body. The reduction of the body into various parts illustrates the futility of the bureaucrat’s attempt at education, cultivation and achievements. The two artists visually manifest the proximity between human and animal flesh. Bacon and Zola illustrate that both killing impulses and vulnerability are common to humans and animals.

However, if Laurent’s animal impulses are liberating, how do we interpret the agonizing visions of Camille that cause his and Thérèse’s double suicide? It is also curious that, after Camille haunts Laurent, his paintings improve. “Where in the devil did you learn to have talent? Ordinarily, that isn’t learned/*Où diable as-tu appris à avoir du talent? Ça ne s’apprend pas d’ordinaire*” (Zola 1953, 212). Laurent’s paintings become energetic and solid, as if created by an experienced artist:

In the life of terror which he led, his mind became delirious and wandered into the ecstasy of genius; the disorder, in some ways a moral one, the nervous temperament which shook his whole being, developed in him an artistic feeling of strange brilliance./

Dans la vie de terreur qu'il menait, sa pensée délirait et montait jusqu'à l'extase du génie; la maladie en quelque sorte morale, la névrose dont tout son être était secoué, développait en lui un sens artistique d'une lucidité étrange. (Zola 1953, 213)

Through a physical and mental transformation, Laurent experiences an artistic breakthrough. This shift mirrors that of other characters in works of the nineteenth-century fiction such as Coriolis and Anatole in *Manette Salomon*, Lucien in *In the Sky* and Claude in *L’Oeuvre*. Zola collapses mental illness and genius into a single neurosis that literally shakes the body free of hindrances (“*son être était secoué*”). Creativity occurs on a physiological level rather than a rational one. Laurent, having shed all societal mores in the brutal slaying of Camille, has also become in touch with a creative force that was almost nonhuman. It is even possible that Laurent channels Camille’s spirit, which is responsible for his newfound, and actually quite limited, talent. All of the faces that he creates seem to resemble Camille no matter how much he tries to change them. “He finished by drawing animals, dogs and cats; the dogs and cats vaguely resembled Camille. [...] It seemed that his hand didn’t belong to him anymore/*Il finit par dessiner des animaux, des chiens et des chats; les chiens et les chats ressemblaient vaguement à Camille.* [...] *Il lui semblait que cette main ne lui appartenait plus*” (Zola 1953, 216). As domesticated animals, cats and dogs cannot escape their master and depend on him or her for survival, Laurent cannot escape Camille, who was his patron and for whom he painted a portrait at the beginning of the novel. Tormented by Camille’s disturbing image to the point of self-destruction, Laurent and Thérèse share a vial of poison and find peace at last.

Thérèse Raquin was written when evolution was a nascent concept, and impressionism had not yet been invented. Furthermore, Zola essentializes animal nature as being determined by a series of biological drives—to eat, to mate, to kill and to create. For this reason, it is challenging to assess whether this text is compatible with contemporary animal theory. Nevertheless, Zola’s work is revolutionary and relevant because it reveals fundamental dichotomies that characterize life during the Second Empire and even today. The conflict between Camille and Laurent, who embody the nineteenth-century debate between conservative and transformative views regarding the diversity of species, ultimately represents the conflict between human and all organic life. Camille exemplifies the bourgeois citizen who believes that animals should be caged, hedges should be manicured, forests should be razed and order should be respected. Such a point of view was particularly prevalent during Haussmann’s reforms of Paris, which sought to widen and align the winding streets and provide buildings with a uniform façade of stone and iron (Larbodiére 2012, 228). A wild bull, Laurent overturns every trace of stability in this bureaucrat’s existence and takes his life. The artist-animal thus epitomizes a powerful,

violent and creative force that wreaks havoc upon majoritarian institutions that seek to fix and control—marriage, family, artistic academies, scientific communities, governmental projects—as well as upon the investment in human superiority over the earth.

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PART II

The Decadent Animals of the Third Republic



CHAPTER 4

The Decadent Deep Sea: Jules Laforgue's “At the Berlin Aquarium”

With its undulating, serpentine lines, shell outlines and aquatic animal figures, deep-sea life-inspired Art Nouveau artists and avant-garde writers Laforgue, Huysmans, Jules Verne and Emile Gallé depicted majestic sea imagery in their creative works. These authors and artists drew from Darwin's observations and theory of evolution, C. Wyville Thomson's deep-sea voyage from 1872 to 1876, Hermann von Helmholtz's discussion of the vision of sea animals, Lamarck's work on invertebrates, popularized science reviews and recently constructed aquariums. Europe's avant-garde also imitated the motifs in Japanese prints that portrayed waves, fish and turtles, offering a new perspective of nature that valued the simplest forms of life (Ernest Renan 1863, 40). Laforgue's works support my central thesis that the artist-animal myth is a key narrative of modernity. During the political, social, industrial and artistic revolutions of the Third Republic in France (as well as in the newly formed German Empire), the interest in animal perception unleashed a myriad of creative possibilities, which shattered cultural norms.

Through my reading of Laforgue's poem “At the Berlin Aquarium” (1895) and art historical essay “Impressionism” (written in 1883), I argue that the aquarium, a window into a magical, pre-evolutionary past that is contained within modern civilization, represents a new role of late nineteenth-century European art. By allowing the public to view oceanic life for the first time, the aquarium offered insight into our evolutionary

beginnings—the origins of creativity. The avant-garde sought to tap into the very depths of the human experience to reach a point at which humanity, animality and innovation were inseparable. However, the artificiality of the aquarium suggests that this connection between human and nonhuman life must ultimately occur through the framework of paintings, poetry or transparent panels. This chapter is centered on Laforgue's poem and his philosophy of impressionism as a jumping-off point into the Decadent deep sea, which was often surrounded by glass. In my analysis of "At the Berlin Aquarium," I ask the reader to consider Laforgue's potential contribution to both the fields of animal studies and aesthetics. In his admiration of the vision of the most uncomplicated creatures, Laforgue destabilizes artistic traditions and societal values. I will approach this topic from three angles, based on the central motifs of his poem: literary aquaria, the aquatic eye and visions of the Orient.

In the section "Literary Aquariums," I contextualize Laforgue's poem within its own literary and scientific milieu and provide a cultural history of the understanding of oceanic life in the nineteenth century. In my examination of works by Laforgue and other authors who wrote on sea life, such as Hugh Lofting, Verne and Huysmans, I focus on the relationship between sea animals and creativity. The public aquarium can be seen as a definitive trope of modern life because it offers a space of quiet repose from the bustling city. But, as we witnessed in the study of *Manette Salomon*, how does the institutional confinement of animals mediate our view of them? Do zoos and aquariums inspire or hinder artistic creation? How does the nineteenth-century aquarium fit within scholarship on zoos, captivity and animal perception? Animal studies scholars such as Berger, Rothfels, Irus Braverman and Malamud have critiqued the illusion that zoos promote educational and cultural awareness by allowing viewers to observe animals in pseudo-natural habitats. I hope to further contribute to these discussions by focusing specifically on literary representations of aquariums as living paintings and windows into a pre-civilized past.

The following section of this chapter, titled "Through the Eyes of Crustaceans," reveals the entwined relationship between evolutionary science and Laforgue's theories of avant-garde perception. According to Alexandra K. Wetlaufer, a specialist in nineteenth-century French studies, Laforgue's prose poems occupy a central place in his artistic theories, which propose a universal aesthetic. She specifically mentions his 1886 poem titled "The Aquarium," another writing on aquariums, whose kaleidoscope of images "could reproduce the order (or disorder) of perception and modern experience" (Wetlaufer 1992, 248). Laforgue's essay

"Impressionism" could essentially be considered an artist-animal manifesto. Laforgue argues that the eye of the academic artist and that of the impressionist have evolved differently. According to the poet, the avant-garde artist has a "primitive eye," which is paradoxically more evolved than other humans because it allows the artist to perceive in a clear and multifaceted manner (Laforgue 1986b, 331). "He is able to see reality in the living atmosphere of forms, refracted, reflected by beings and things, in incessant variations/*Il arrive à voir la réalité dans l'atmosphère vivante des formes, décomposée, réfractée, réfléchie par les êtres et les choses, en incessantes variations*" (Laforgue 1986b, III 330). The understanding that there could be multiple ways of seeing beyond a unique, normative perception paralleled both the mission of the avant-garde and natural scientific research. Finally, in "Visions of the Orient," I critique the poem's representation of sea animals as exotic, foreign and spiritual beings. I will also examine the Orientalist narratives in Laforgue's art criticism and in his admiration of Japanese art and Buddhist thought as alternatives to the mundane existence of Western life.

From the mid- to late nineteenth century, major European cities experienced drastic changes in their infrastructure. As Paris underwent Haussmann's reforms, Berlin transformed into one of the most powerful industrial and commercial centers in the world. As the capital of the German Empire, which was newly formed in 1871, the city witnessed tremendous population growth, doubling to two million by 1905. In addition to producing steel, machinery and textiles, Berlin helped spearhead the "Second Industrial Revolution," founded on electricity and chemicals (Jelavich 1993, 11). Factories polluted its air and poisoned the Spree River. The urbanization and industrialization of European cities was one of the many critical forces that contributed to the public's fascination with the deep sea as an escape or refuge from the contaminated metropolis.

As a result, European cities opened aquariums during this period, beginning with the London Zoo Fish House in 1853. The Berlin Aquarium, which opened in 1869 and closed in 1910, featured 50 tanks embedded in rock (Fig. 4.1). Partly made of geological materials, the three-story underwater establishment resembled a grotto in the middle of the city center (Strehlow 2001, 65). The Aquarium *Unter den Linden*, the name of a major avenue, featured fish, reptiles and cages of small mammals including monkeys and a "flying cage" filled with birds (Flower 1905, 28, Fig. 4.2). In 1874, Otto Hermes, the aquarium's new director, successfully created artificial saltwater and was able to import oceanic animals through trading posts in the Mediterranean (Strehlow 2001, 70–71). This



Fig. 4.1 Drawing of a Grotto in the Berlin Aquarium Unter den Linden, 1870. Wikimedia Commons. United States Public Domain

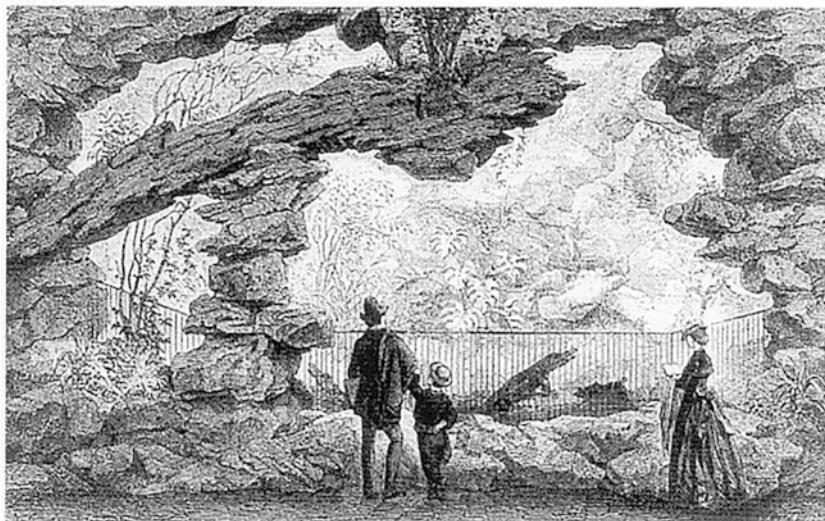


Fig. 4.2 Drawing of Berlin Aquarium Unter den Linden, 1870. Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain

integration of the ocean with an urban institution culminates in Laforgue's (1860–1887) little known poem "At the Berlin Aquarium," which was published posthumously in *La Revue blanche*.

Laforgue's poetry and art criticism can be seen as a bridge between the novels of the Goncourt brothers and Zola previously discussed in this book and the later Decadent works of Rachilde and Mirbeau. Written nearly two decades after *Manette Salomon* and *Thérèse Raquin*, Laforgue's work champions a widely recognized movement in art that was only in its nascent stages in 1867. As I will later discuss, Laforgue's essay "Impressionism" partly explains impressionistic vision in relation to Darwin's theory of atavistic regression, the reversion of certain organs to a less developed state. Published in *The Descent of Man*, this theory was a major influence on *fin de siècle* literature. Decadent literature reflects a dramatic change in its consideration of animals compared to the ambivalent works of the Second Empire, which enclosed animals and avant-gardists in actual and metaphorical cages. The Decadent movement aimed to release one's inner demons and relieve the mind and body from the stranglehold of human thought (Sentell 2009, 1). On the one hand, Laforgue's art criticism affirms the revolutionary nature of the impressionist project as well as its link to evolutionary theory. On the other hand, his poem "At the Berlin Aquarium" still reflects animals in captivity within a European metropolis. This chapter discusses the particular uniqueness of Laforgue's project in which the fish tank is a vessel that transports the viewer to a majestic underwater universe, the starting point of all life and beauty.

Laforgue states that this theory of art is directly influenced by evolutionary science. As I will later elaborate upon, Laforgue had obviously read Darwin, whom he mentioned by name multiple times in his works, and was at least aware of Lamarck, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Cuvier, whom he connects to aesthetics.¹ In his agenda dated August 16th, 1883, he notes seeing Henry Cross' marble bust of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, which is now found in the Muséum national d'histoire naturelle in Paris. In a letter to Charles Ephrussi, editor of *Gazette des beaux-arts*, dated December 1883, Laforgue writes that he had formulated a ten-page-long aesthetic theory that weds "the unconsciousness of Hartmann, the transformism of Darwin, the work of Helmholtz [a Darwinian scientist]/*L'Inconscient de Hartmann, le transformisme de Darwin, les travaux de Helmholtz*" (Laforgue 1986b, 269). Laforgue argues that "this explains the spontaneous genius, about which Taine is silent/ça explique le génie spontanée,

sur quoi Taine se tait” (Laforgue 1986b, 269). “*Transformisme*” and “*la génération spontanée*” were terms used by Lamarck. Mireille Dottin-Orsini, a scholar of Laforgue, claims, “He also read Darwin and Lamarck, believing in the evolution of the eye towards the ultraviolet, and had a favorable judgment regarding impressionism: the most ‘advanced’ eye would make the best painting/*Il a lu aussi Darwin et Lamarck, croit à l'évolution de l'œil en route vers l'ultraviolet, et tire un jugement favorable à l'impressionnisme: l'œil le plus ‘avancé’ fera la meilleure peinture*” (1988, 27). According to Darwin’s theory of natural selection, an organism whose traits were better adapted to its environment would most likely pass on those traits to its progeny. Changes in the functioning of an organ—in this case, the eyes—would occur gradually over generations. According to Lamarck’s disproven theory of transformation, an organism’s organ would spontaneously mutate and evolve in its own lifetime. Laforgue proposes the erroneous Lamarckian belief of the heredity of acquired traits when he writes, “Due to the inheritance of acquired modifications in the tactile and visual organs, the sense of forms passed from the fingers to the hand/*Par hérédité des modifications acquises entre la faculté des organes tactiles et celle de l'organe visuel, le sens des formes a passé des doits dans l'œil*” (Laforgue 1986b, 330). For the poet, impressionists’ bodies have mutated, from their hands to their eyes, creating a novel expression of an entirely new vision.²

I believe that in some ways Laforgue’s theory of impressionism can be seen as a precursor to Deleuzian concepts of creativity analyzed in the previous chapter, which portray innovation as a visceral and animal-like explosion that annihilates earlier modes of thought and expression. Although a minor poet, Laforgue articulated an essential framework for viewing art. The notion that the modern artist is a bridge between the prehistoric and the present still resonates today. However, it is also necessary to critique the contradictory, and colonialist, longing to return to a “natural source” through the artificial framework of the aquarium.

Like a visitor peering through the glass of an aquarium, Laforgue’s place in literary history could be described as that of an insider on the outside. In his short life, he was a recognized Decadent writer whose name people barely knew. Even in two of his obituaries after his death on August 22, 1887, *Le cri de Paris* accidentally called Laforgue “Lafargue,” and *Revue illustré* mistakenly claimed that the writer died at age 25 instead of 27. This French *fin de siècle* poet was born in Uruguay and later lived in

Paris and Berlin. Laforgue was a protégé of Paul Bourget and was also compared to Stéphane Mallarmé, Gustave Khan and Paul Verlaine, who shared Laforgue's editor, Léon Vanier (Lefrère 2005, 268). However, he is not well known outside of specific literary circles.

This poet was a forerunner in modern French art criticism, yet he spent most of his time outside of France, in Berlin, Germany. Laforgue was the secretary of Charles Ephrussi, an art collector, friend of Édouard Manet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir and the director of *Gazette des beaux-arts* for which Laforgue was an official art critic in Germany (Dottin-Orsini 1988, 12). Laforgue was a defender and theorist of the impressionists, and scholars have categorized him as a literary impressionist (Dottin-Orsini 1988, 29). The critic was exposed to the work of Monet, Degas and Berthe Morisot, among others (Laforgue 1986b, 223). Impressionism was not only the subject of numerous art critiques but was also integral to Laforgue's own style of poetry, which aimed to be brief, impressionistic sketches of modern life. Laforgue's minoritarian status, to use the term by Deleuze and Guattari, can provide an alternative and thought-provoking perspective on an artistic movement, which despite its growing popularity in the late nineteenth century was relatively minor itself. Written by a poet-nomad who traversed artistic, literary and geographical boundaries, Laforgue's minor literature could be said to have "ambiguous edges, changing borders, that differ from this or that material" (Deleuze and Guattari 1975, 124).

Laforgue's poetry and art criticism are minoritarian because the author writes of a process that is not concretized, fixed or stagnant. His integration of spontaneous generation into an aesthetic theory is an attempt to arrive at something entirely new—which defies not only scientific understanding, but the very structure of human thought, which, according to Deleuze and Guattari, attempts to conceive of an item according to resemblance to another item (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 255). The theorists argue that systematized classification ("series-structure") permeates through all aspects of life, repressing creative forces. In the case of art, Laforgue proposes a new expression of forms that do not necessarily resemble those of the past. The underlying issue here is not aesthetic but ideological—Laforgue could be advocating for the freedom for each person to have his or her own perspective—his or her unique take on life—a vision that may or may not fit within a standard, traditional or authoritative viewpoint. Proposing a break from filiation, Deleuze and Guattari

write, “The history of ideas should never be continuous” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 257). They add, “Yet the objective relationships between animals have been applied to certain subjective relationships between man and animal from the standpoint of a collective imagination or a faculty of social understanding” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 257). In the rest of this chapter, we will determine whether Laforgue’s observation of creatures within the aquarium walls and inside the pages of natural science do indeed constitute a rupture from the ways animals are traditionally seen or imagined and the implication of this vision for the art of modernity.

In his essay “Impressionism,” Laforgue articulates the impressionist project within its own time period, illustrating the devaluation of academic training. The poet argues that the truly creative artist should only rely on the optical sensitivity of the naked eye, which captures a multitude of prismatic reflections of light: “The impressionist is a modern painter, who, gifted with a sensitive eye that is uncommon, forgetting the paintings stockpiled for centuries in museums, forgetting the optical education (drawing, perspective, colors), lives and sees frankly and primitively in luminous, outdoor spectacles/*L’Impressionniste est un peintre moderniste qui, doué d’une sensibilité hors du commun, oubliant les tableaux amassés par les siècles dans les musées, oubliant l’éducation optique de l’école (dessin et perspective, coloris), à force de vivre et de voir franchement et primitivement dans les spectacles lumineux en plein air*” (Laforgue 1986b, 329). Such individualized perception defies the notions of absolute beauty and taste. While Degas and Monet had trained with academic artists, they espoused a new art based on the direct observation of nature and the depiction of modern life (Robbiani 1990, 3).

Although the biological definition of “primitive” indicates traits that are characteristic of an earlier evolutionary form, Laforgue’s use of the word is disconcerting given the public fascination with colonial exhibitions. As we will later discuss, Social Darwinism, the belief that Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection can be applied to the functioning of a nation, was used to justify the exploitation, cruelty and murder of indigenous people. “Primitive” is a loaded term, which has sociological, anthropological, biological and artistic meanings that may have racist connotations. The scientific and artistic interest in animals in the nineteenth century coalesced with studies on ethnology. As Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire illustrate, virtually all media during this time presented non-Western people “as the vestiges of the first

stages of humanity/*comme des vestiges des premiers états de l'humanité*" (Bancel et al. 2002, 2). The narrator's desire to return to a "primitive" state cannot be separated from the public view that indigenous people were already in such a state. We must keep this historical context in mind. The tension between East and West is also complicated in Laforgue's works due to his claim to be a Western Buddhist who seeks harmony with the world around him. As I will later discuss, it is perhaps questionable whether his quest for wholeness might be based on Orientalist prejudices or if his philosophy expresses a genuine connection between all other forms of life.

Few scholars in recent years have discussed either Laforgue's theories on modern art or his "At the Berlin Aquarium" poem. Chad Wesley Airhart discusses Laforgue's aesthetic theory in his PhD dissertation titled *A Journey to Physical Painting*. Airhart focuses on Laforgue's "process of physical immediacy" and the belief that the impressionist has "a special optical sensitivity that allows him to connect the eye to the hand" (Airhart 2005, 46–47). Airhart does not discuss Laforgue's incorporation of Helmholtz or Darwin into his works, and he does not connect this narrative of "optical sensitivity" to nonhuman species. Peter Nicholls' article "Arid clarity: Ezra Pound, Mina Loy, and Jules Laforgue" is an important discussion of the influence of Laforgue's aquarium on Ezra Pound's work. Nicholls argues that "At the Berlin Aquarium" focuses on an "almost fetishistic delight in language for its own sake, in the rich 'opacity' of words to use Laforgue's own term" (Nicholls 2002, 36). In contrast, I believe that Laforgue's poem is not an example of *l'art pour l'art*, and a detailed textual examination of "At the Berlin Aquarium" reveals its cultural implications, scientific context and historical framework. Nicholls writes, "In the closed regions of the Aquarium's dreamlike, subaqueous worlds words no longer had to cleave to things but could be relished for themselves" (Nicholls 2002, 37). This quotation perceptively suggests that the institution of an aquarium is closely tied to poetic expression, and there is a certain artifice to both poetry and aquariums. However, with such loaded terminology as "these old races of the Orient/*ces vieilles races d'Orient*," it is essential to deconstruct the Orientalist implications of the poem. Additionally, in considering the words of the poem as "things in themselves," this reading could possibly deny the profound connection that the narrator experiences between himself and the animals in the aquarium.

4.1 LITERARY AQUARIUMS

In Laforgue's "At the Berlin Aquarium," written in 1885 and published in *La Revue blanche* in 1895, the narrator idealizes the perception of aquatic creatures. During his Berlin years from 1881 to 1886, the poet frequently visited the establishment. The aquarium became a central image in much of his prose poetry published in the revue *La Vogue* and in the tale *Salomé* in the manuscript *Daniel Sickles* (Laforgue 1986c, 606). "At the Berlin Aquarium" describes the gaze of these sea animals as being still, sagacious and Buddha-like. Laforgue's descriptions affirm an imagined pre-evolutionary state of being, indicating that as creatures evolve their ways of seeing become conditioned by knowledge.

At the Berlin Aquarium—In front of the still, satiated, wise, Buddhist stare of the crocodiles, the pythons (the ophites), etc. As I understand these old races of the Orient who had exhausted all the senses, all the temperaments, all the metaphysics—and who finished by worshiping, beatifying like a symbol of promised Nirvana these blank stares about which one cannot say if they are more infinite than immutable—

But the ideal is the sponges, these starfish, these plasmas in the opaque and fresh silence, all in a dream of water./

A l'aquarium de Berlin—Devant le regard atone, gavé, sage, bouddhique des crocodiles, des pythons (les ophites), etc. Comme je comprends ces vieilles races d'Orient qui avaient épuisé tous les sens, tous les tempéraments, toutes les métaphysiques—et qui finissaient par adorer, béatifier comme un symbole du Nirvâna promis ces regards nuls dont on ne peut dire s'ils sont plus infinis qu'immuables.—

Mais l'idéal c'est ces éponges, ces astéries, ces plasmas dans le silence opaque et frais, tout au rêve, de l'eau. (Laforgue 1986a, 606)³

For Laforgue, the aquarium is a *tableau vivant*, a living painting that is a microcosm of unseen and uncharted universes. This short prose poem is extremely rich in content and expresses a particular nineteenth-century dualistic ethos. On the one hand, "At the Berlin Aquarium" illustrates the public, Orientalist fascination with the non-European and, thus, supposedly, nonhuman other, which is aestheticized, spiritualized and put on display as an object of difference. Fittingly, many of the animals at the aquarium were from the East, including an alligator from China and an elephant trunk snake from Java, which fascinated Western spectators (Flower 1905, 28). On the other hand, the poem seeks to absolve such differences by venerating the sublime beauty that exists outside the mun-

dane existence of modern life. As I will later explain, this poem reflects the nineteenth-century avant-garde's incredible interest in Japanese art and thought. As perhaps a form of Buddhist meditation ("worshipping," "beatifying"), the poem expresses a sense of oneness between all living creatures. Both of these views were not considered mutually exclusive during this period. The author fuses spiritual transformation with biological descent.

The vision expressed in this poem is emblematic of a nineteenth-century global vision whose drive for industrial and scientific progress is perhaps as obsessive as its nostalgic desire to be one with the natural world. The poet's idealization of sponges, starfish and plasma indicates that Laforgue privileges the most primitive, even eyeless, creatures. The animals' sensory experience of the world transcends that of human vision. In fact, rather than portraying the aquatic animals as savage beasts that are incapable of human-like understanding, Laforgue portrays the sea creatures as wise beings who have experienced life to the fullest ("gavé"). Completely still ("atone") and sagacious, the eyes of the crocodiles and serpents reflect quiet respite from fast-paced and pressured city life. How could this poem contribute to our contemporary views on animals? Is this poem an affirmation of what McHugh would call a "shared lives" (McHugh 2011, 5).

The first word "devant" ("In front of") might lead the reader to believe that a viewer stands before an aquarium and gazes at the animals inside. However, the word "regard" ("gaze") inverts this idea. The animals are also, in fact, staring at the viewer. Already, Laforgue is reversing the typical depiction of the interaction between humans and animals in which animals are usually the objects of the human gaze. Contemporary zoological scholarship often asserts that looking at animals in zoos is an exercise of dominion. Braverman argues that by allowing us to view individual animals of various species, zoos and aquariums reify our concept of the natural world and incite compassion. However, the scholar also argues that zoos and aquariums thus exert what Foucault calls "pastoral power." By caring for the animals, we control them (Braverman 2013, 21). Berger notes that looking at animals in modernity "is like fish seen through a plate glass aquarium" because technical artifice separates us and them (1980, 14). According to Berger, the human wish to gaze at animals expresses a longing to live among them in "nature" (Berger 1980, 4–5). When humans and animals look at each other in zoos, communication is thwarted by fear, the impending threat of violence and the lack of common language (Berger 1980, 5). Even when this gaze is reciprocal, we also become

deeply aware of how we are different from other species. “And yet the animal is distinct, and comparable with human power but never coinciding with it” (1980, 5). Laforgue’s description of the animals’ blank stares indicates an admiration for their naïve ways of looking. Their eyes are a sort of *tabula rasa*, devoid of cultural knowledge. They are like blank canvases with infinite potential and possibilities. “At the Berlin Aquarium” also imagines how small creatures may experience the world even if they do not have developed eyes. The gaze of the impressionist artist supposedly mirrors that of the invertebrate, which escaped the assumed “false education of our eyes,” training and experience that distort perception (Laforgue 1986b, 331).

Derrida is perhaps the most crucial theorist for contemplating the human/animal gaze in relation to the arts and literature. As part of his “zootobiography,” Derrida famously describes his experience of feeling ashamed while being nude in front of his cat. Contemplating animal subjectivity regarding the essential philosophical question “Who am I,” he asks himself why he feels shame: “Ashamed of what and in front of whom?” (Derrida 2008, 18), which leads to an inquiry about the distinction between human and animal as well that between oneself and another. “As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called ‘animal’ offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the border crossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself” (Derrida 2008, 12). Interestingly, the word “abyssal” refers to the depths of the ocean, where humans can never inhabit. Labeling another creature’s gaze as “animal” reinforces one’s status as human.

However, if the two gazes truly meet, and this border is temporarily suspended or dissolved, the results become cataclysmic: “I am like a child ready for the apocalypse, I am (following) the apocalypse itself, that is to say, the ultimate and first event of the end, the unveiling and the verdict. I am (following) it, the apocalypse, I identify with it by running behind it, after it, after its whole zoo-logy” (Derrida 2008, 12). Derrida claims that for most philosophers, the division between human and animal is knowledge and self-awareness. Thus, in this moment, he is “like a child ready for the apocalypse” because human knowledge, including that of time and space, would be momentarily interrupted. As apocalypse usually means the end of the world,⁴ but it would be an end of “the human world,” the annihilation of the way in which we categorize, conquer and divide life

around us. One could even draw comparisons between Derrida's experience and the line in Laforgue's poem about exhausting "all the senses, all the temperaments, all the metaphysics" minus the Orientalist reference. For Derrida, this apocalyptic state is only temporary. "When the instant of extreme passion passes, and I find peace again, then I can speak calmly of the beasts of the Apocalypse, visit them in the museum, see them in a painting (but for the Greeks 'zoography' referred to the portraiture of the living in general and not just the painting of animals); I can visit them at the zoo, read about them in the Bible, or speak about them as in a book" (Derrida 2008, 12). This momentary apocalypse, where the division between human and animal is effaced, is a shattering and "passionate" force that is both disruptive and integral to cultural praxes. Traditional humanist institutions and practices contain, organize, mediate and help us interpret raw encounters with "what they call animal." "Always a discourse of man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and in man" (Derrida 2008, 37).

However, we must again acknowledge that, for the most part, nineteenth-century scientists and artists alike studied animals in captivity. As discussed in the chapter on *Manette Salomon*, Malamud argues that zoological parks treat animals as spectacles rather than promoting understanding. "But a caged animal in the heart of a city, perhaps thousands of miles from its habitat, really offers little insight into the natural condition of that species" (Malamud 2007, 1). Similarly, David Hancocks writes that by separating animals from their environment, they become cultural curiosities rather than autonomous subjects (Hancocks 2001, 424). In Rothfels' study of the transition between the menagerie and the modern zoo, he asks, "Why is it important for us that we hide real elements in the unnatural histories of these animals so that we can see their natural history in such detail" (Rothfels 2002, 7)? Captivity thus causes us to project our ideas of what organisms should be, creating either romanticized or demonized views of them. We shall see both of these contrasting views in the writings of Laforgue and Huysmans, who portray sea life as either enlightened beings or diabolical creatures, respectively.

Aquariums also conjure up imagined nostalgia for a pre-civilized past, or what Romain Rolland and Sigmund Freud call an "oceanic feeling." Zoos, as both Spotte and Rothfels argue, nourish this desire by presenting the illusion of an unspoiled Eden or a protective Ark. The numerous references to spiritual utopias in "At the Berlin Aquarium" confirm this idea.

Ophite, a Greek term for the serpent of Genesis, represents the fall from a natural haven and the rise of a corrupted civilization.

Donna Haraway, whose research traverses the fields of feminism, primatology and technology, argues that, as a reaction to the fractured and alienating nature of modernity, nineteenth-century European writers and artists reinforced “the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror” (Haraway 1991, 131). Found in the Garden of Eden or on the Ark, literary depictions of wildlife in the nineteenth century reinforce a “myth of original unity” even if simultaneously filled with ecstasy and horror. Similarly, as an intermediary between these two worlds, aquariums allow us to peer into primordial paradise from behind the protective glass of an urban institution. Haraway writes, “Animals have continued to have a special status as natural objects that can show people their origin, and therefore their pre-rational, pre-management, pre-cultural essence” (Haraway 1991, 258). The repetition of the prefix “pre” suggests a mythical “before and after” period, during which man becomes aware of and conditioned by the ideas of others. As I argue throughout this essay, Laforgue’s aquarium suggests a new paradigm for art, literature and zoological institutions of the nineteenth century to peer into our pre-evolutionary existence. Haraway critiques such an understanding during this time that animals represent a preindustrial and pre-urbanized other for Westerners in modernity.

However, through a Laforguian lens, avant-garde art can serve to rectify the divide between nature and culture. As Berger laments, “The nineteenth century, in western Europe and North America saw the beginning of a process, today being completed by twentieth century corporate capitalism by which every tradition between man and nature had been broken” (1980, 3). Aquariums have a dual nature. On the one hand, they fulfill a psychic need to remove oneself from the pandemonium of the metropolis and enter an extraordinary world filled with exquisite beauty. As the opposite of modern complexity, these simplistic creatures expand human consciousness to an awareness that is particularly nonhuman. On the other hand, because aquariums imprison live creatures from all over the world in major cities, they also represent Western human dominion over even the most profound chasms of the earth.

Maritime adventure stories represent a quest to “get back to the source.” In Lofting’s *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle* (1922), the titular naturalist embarks on a journey to find the last of the Giant Shellfish. In this children’s book, an English-speaking fidget fish details how he and his

sister Clippa had escaped captivity in a British aquarium and returned to the sea. According to Malamud's interpretation of this scene, "Representations of captivity, constraint, and exhibition in stories about fish and reptiles confirm that aquariums, for all practical purposes function as zoos" (Malamud 2007, 157). But is there something special about aquariums that does not apply to zoos? Describing a loud and chaotic zoo in Berlin in *Salomé*, Laforgue writes that the birds of prey have deafening screeches (Laforgue 1986c, 609). However, he pauses: "The Aquarium! Ah! The Aquarium for example! Let's stop here! How it whirls in silence" (Laforgue 1986c, 609). The aquarium functions as a place of quiet respite for the urban *flâneur*.

I would argue that in the cultural consciousness, aquariums, unlike zoos, also represent a portal into an unseen underwater world from whence we emerged during the early stages of human evolution. The aquarium epitomizes the desire to "return." Lofting writes, relating the fidget fish's story:

"The Sea!" murmured poor Clippa with a far-away look in her eyes (she had fine eyes, had my sister, Clippa). 'How like a dream it sounds—the Sea! Oh brother, will we ever swim in it again, think you? Every night as I lie awake on the floor of this evil-smelling dungeon I hear its hearty voice ringing in my ears. How I have longed for it! Just to feel it once again, the nice, big, wholesome homeliness of it all! To jump, just to jump from the crest of an Atlantic wave, laughing in the trade wind's spindrift, down into the blue-green swirling trough! To chase the shrimps on a summer evening, when the sky is red and the light's all pink within the foam! To lie on the top, in the doldrums' noonday calm, and warm your tummy in the tropic sun!' (Lofting 1922, 273)

The sea sparks the captive fish's imagination and nostalgia, evoking an explosion of visual ("eyes," "blue-green," "the sky is red and the light's all pink"), olfactory ("evil-smelling") and tactile ("warm your tummy," "wander hand in hand") sensations, which cannot be experienced within the grimy bounds of the aquarium tank. Clippa's vision of the sea mirrors the experience of the European urbanite that yearns for Shangri-la. Clippa's dream of escaping to the Indian Ocean parallels the colonial fantasy of leaving Europe in search of faraway wonderland. Before the mid-nineteenth century, scientists did not exactly know what types of life existed in the deep sea beyond the naked eye (Gamwell 2002, 86). The first mechanical submarine, *Le Plongeur*, was launched in 1863 and was

featured in the Exposition Universelle of 1867. Darwin's discovery of 67 organic forms on the voyage of the HMS *Beagle* illustrated the value of the tiniest and simplest of creatures. Edward O. Wilson writes of Darwin, "No creature was too small to excite his interests" (In Darwin 2005, 18). After the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, C. Wyville Thomson explored the ocean's depths on the *Challenger* expedition from 1872 to 1876 and discovered thousands of new species of animals and plants. This expedition expanded the public's knowledge of the world's inhabitable regions by over 75 percent (Gamwell 2002, 82). Thomson's *The Report of the H.M.S. Challenger* (1889) provided hundreds of full-page illustrations to Europeans who were able to view detailed sketches of the sea creatures. In fact, several species of the creatures mentioned in Laforgue's poem were discovered during Thomson's expedition on the *Challenger*. In addition to finding starfish and sponges that had "very much the appearance of the trunk of a tree" (Thomson 1889, 174), Thomson found plasma—what Laforgue claimed to be "the ideal"—throughout the bottom of the Atlantic. Thomson claimed that he found "everything in the ooze" due to the multitude of animals traveling along it (Thomson 1889, 117).

Laforgue's attention to invertebrates, in particular, reverses the notion that only biologically and intellectually complex creatures merit scientific and poetic inquiry—thus devaluing the intricacy of the human body or any organism that lacks a backbone. Laforgue's interest in sponges and starfish also reflects Lamarck's multivolume work on invertebrates, whose study of the respiratory and circular systems of mollusks is still on display at the present-day Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle. Reports of the museum in 1851 even state that the sponge was the first animal that visitors would see in the museum (Henry 1851, 49). Lamarck scholar Léon Szyfman argues that the study of invertebrates alters metaphysical conceptions (Szyfman 1987, 21). In fact, even though we as land-dwelling mammals may see vertebrates as the most valuable, 95 percent of animal life on earth is comprised of invertebrates (Simon et al. 2016, 375).

According to historian Lynn Gamwell, the public became fascinated by the "mysterious creatures of the deep. Aquariums were established and Verne took readers on an underwater voyage to meet captain Nemo (Latin for 'nobody'), an early modern anti-hero, the wanderer without a homeland" (Gamwell 2002, 86, Fig. 4.3). Aquariums and literature are both means of accessing the majestic worlds of the deep sea for the public who is unable to embark upon voyages and serves as a window to the enchanting unknown. The excitement over these sea creatures reflects a radical shift in

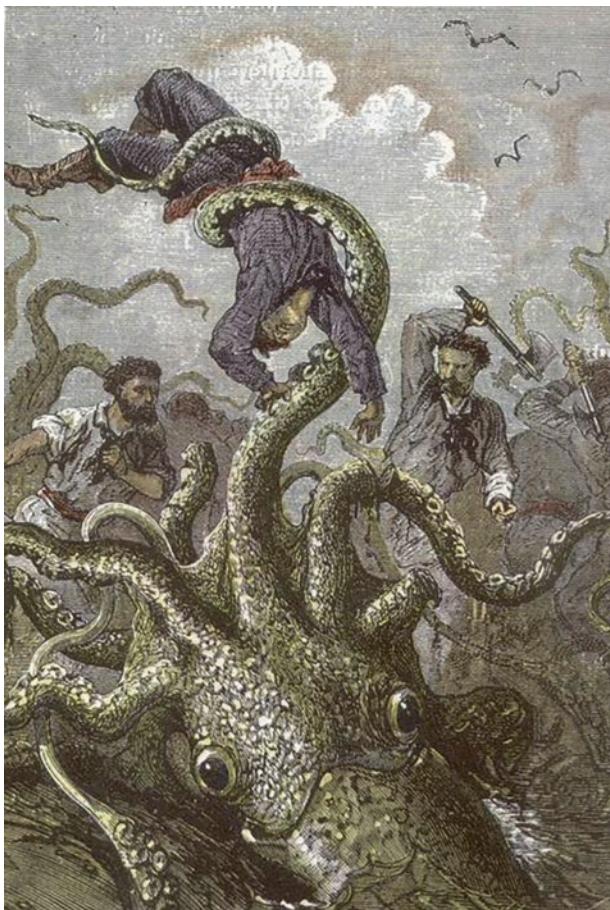


Fig. 4.3 Henri Hildibrand. *Illustration for Jules Verne's 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, 1877. Wikimedia Commons. United States Public Domain

consciousness regarding the importance of human reason and complexity as the sole means of functioning. Evolved creatures were no longer seen as the most important subject of scientific or cultural interest (Gamwell 2002, 82).

In Huysmans' version of "The Berlin Aquarium" (1902), the author warns against the artificial, seductive and even frightening nature of the

aquarium. In the beginning of the poem, the narrator temporarily evades the unattractive industrial city and enters the public aquarium, a portal to the fantastical deep sea. He abandons the Spree River, described as a dirty gutter (“*une rigole d'eau sale*”) to find glorious waters brimming with multicolored coral. The noises of machinery fall silent amid the squawking of macaws. Initially, the aquarium serves as an escape valve from the pollution and crowdedness of this commercial capital, which he believes to be “*plus fastidieuse et plus laide*” than all other cities (Huysmans 1972a, 204).

In a tirade, which consists of one sentence that stretches over half a page enumerating the vile urban figures and their environment, Huysmans writes:

On the sidewalks, marched sweaty officers, strapped in sticky tunics and black pants with red strings; and they pass, right, a monocle as big as a wheel of a locomotive in the eye, chewing, in torrents of smoke from the tree trunks and bouncing, on the pavement [...] Human ugliness, here, has a particularly insolent appearance on the officer, silly on the woman, and serious on the bourgeois./

Sur les trottoirs défilent des officiers gommés, sanglés dans des tuniques collantes et dans de noires culottes à vermicelle rouge; et ils passent, droits, un monocle grand comme une roue de locomotive dans l'œil, mâchant, dans des torrents de fumée des troncs d'arbres et faisant rebondir, sur le pavé, [...] La laideur humaine a, ici, un aspect particulièrement insolent chez le galonné, bêbête chez la femme, et, chez le bourgeois, grave. (Huysmans 1972a, 204)

The lack of periods in this sentence mimics the suffocating feeling that an urbanite might experience in a Berlin crowd. This passage illustrates two horrors of humanity during the *fin de siècle*: the ecological devastation from machines “torrents of smoke/*des torrents de fumée*” and the ever-increasing military might from the German army “officers/*des officiers*.” Both atrocities are brought together in the comparison of a monocle to a locomotive wheel in the eye—which indicates a singular, oppressive vision of the external world. All must be viewed in terms of militaristic power or industrial gain. Such a vision dramatically contrasts with Laforgue’s emphasis on the multiple ways that different creatures see.

“La laideur humaine” in all senses of the words will thus contrast with the beauty found in the aquarium. Outside, the Spree River is a dank and polluted sewer, where, according to Wilhem Raabe’s 1884 novel *Pfisters Mühle*, floated rancid dead fish. In contrast, inside, the narrator is transported to a magical universe where exotic fish glide past brightly colored

coral (Huysmans 1972a, 212). In this safe haven, the narrator is seemingly removed from the violence and destruction of the human realm. Huysmans writes, "There are not any butterflies or birds whose allure could compare. It's the garden of mermaids and Undines/*Il n'est point sur la terre de papillons ou d'oiseaux dont l'éclat se puisse comparer au leur. C'est le jardin des Sirènes et la ménagerie des Ondines*" (Huysmans 1972a, 213). These phenomenal creatures are more incredible than all the city's monuments, which the narrator argues lack cultural value. An undine is a sea nymph who has lost her gift of eternal life because she married a mortal man, possibly indicating that the role of the aquarium is to provide people access to an enchanted parallel universe. However, as undines cannot coexist with humans, neither can these sea creatures. The aquarium is merely an illusion where manatees are mistaken for mermaids.

At the end, the narrator shifts his perspective and describes the ominous aspects of the animals. In the poem, the fish appear modern but from the time of "false gods/*faux-dieux*" and "demons of paganism/*démons du paganisme*" (Huysmans 1972a, 218). These descriptions suggest that humans of today cannot permanently dwell in this seemingly magical, aquatic world of the past. The wheels of progress are already in motion and cannot be derailed. While one is at first seduced by the splendor of the aquatic animals, he or she may realize that they are, in fact, equally embedded in the capitalist system of violence and exploitation. There is no external nature where one may retreat. Similarly, in *À Rebours*, des Esseintes, an intellectual shut-in, places an aquarium with "mechanical fish/*poissons mecaniques*" and "fake grass/*fausses herbes*" in front of a portal in area of his home built like a ship. This passage underscores the artifice of the aquarium, emphasized by the words "*méchaniques*" and "*fausses*." No live plant or animal has any place in des Esseintes' constructed world (Huysmans 1972b).

In Huysmans' "The Berlin Aquarium," some of the creatures seem to have borrowed from man "the colors of metal forged in factories/*les couleurs des métaux forgés dans ses usines*" (Huysmans 1972a, 217). A crustacean appears to be "made in the workshops of Krupp/*fabriqué dans les ateliers de Krupp*," which produced railroad tires and army weapons, "or in the foundries of Creusot/*ou dans les fonderies du Creusot*," an iron mining town in France (Huysmans 1972a, 218). Both images refer back to the militaristic and industrial exploits of the city. Similarly, the narrator describes an invertebrate as "a metallic monster, a kind of crab blinded like a warship/*un monstre métallique, une sorte de crabe blindé comme un vaisseau de guerre*" (Huysmans 1972a, 217). Contained within an artificially

constructed institution, the animals are products of technology, machinery and violence. In the conclusion of the Huysmans' text, the narrator is so relieved to leave the aquarium that he even wants to embrace the Berlin passersby, "as we now consider them attractive, the faces of the swordsmen with monocles and homeopaths with gold glasses/*tant on les juge maintenant avenantes, les faces des traîneurs de sabres à monocles et des homéopathes à lunettes d'or*" (Huysmans 1972a, 218). The repeated pronoun "one/on" could refer to the experience of a profit-driven citizen of Berlin, who accepts the dominating, unilateral vision of the military and the gilded gaze of pseudoscience.

Laforgue portrays aquatic animals as austere, pure, spiritual beings. His poem implies that humans can learn from the animals in the aquarium, and that they should emulate the animals' vision. In contrast, while Huysmans' text initially seems misanthropic, the end of the text affirms human existence and industrial progress. The author of *À Rebours* denies the illusion of the aquarium as unspoiled nature and a means of encountering our untainted origins. By contrast, Laforgue's poem does not acknowledge the obvious contradiction that a person views "nature" within a human-made institution. Although Laforgue focuses on the "blank stares" of animals, Pick suggests that this concept can also occur in human environments in our contemporary era. "Alongside wild nature, the city is a prime location for this blank looking. What do we find in the eyes of strangers as they momentarily meet our own in a crowded street?" (Pick 2011, 171). While Laforgue idealizes the sea creatures' empty stare, Huysmans concentrates on the Berlin passersby's vacant gaze.

The profound transformation of European society propelled writers into a deeper exploration of the environment as a creative force. In *Feuilles Volantes*, Laforgue writes: "I feel so poor, so known; as I know myself, Laforgue, in relationship to the exterior world, and I have mines of happy coral without dreams, ruby lionesses, subtle blossoms where the eye of consciousness has not brought axes or fire/*Je me sens si pauvre, si connu; tel que je me connais, moi, Laforgue en relation avec le monde extérieur, et j'ai des mines coraux heureux sans rêves, des lionnes de rubis, des floraisons subtiles où l'œil de la conscience n'a pas porté la hache et le feu*" (Laforgue 1986c, II 103–04). The poet or artist is like a deep-sea diver who penetrates deeper and deeper into the layers of both the psyche and physical body, discovering frightening, mystical and astounding imagery previously unseen by civilized man (Laforgue 1986c, II 103–04). Just as deep-sea voyages proved that there were biologically primitive creatures living in the previously undiscovered

ered depths of the ocean, it is in the undiscovered depths of the artist's own mind that true creativity takes place. For Laforgue, it is necessary to find a place in one's self that is untouched by human civilization, a space where even "hatchets and fire" cannot penetrate.

Although Laforgue presents his art as rooted in "nature," its inherent artifice and construction shine glaringly through the text. Because aquariums are institutions of captivity, does Laforgue's poem affirm the inter-connectivity between humans and other species? In what ways does the vision that Laforgue advocates in this poem and in other writings challenge or reinforce our accepted ways of viewing both humans and animals? How does this possible ideological shift impact the visual arts? In order to answer these questions, I will now turn to Laforgue's art criticism, which affirms artistic innovation as specifically nonhuman. I will explain how this idealized animal stare, described paradoxically as "satiated," "wise" and "blank," is similar to the ways in which Laforgue portrays artistic vision.

4.2 THROUGH THE EYES OF CRUSTACEANS

In the silent labyrinth of the Berlin Aquarium, the narrator of Laforgue's *Salomé* meditates on the differences between the sensory perception of the aquatic creatures and that of human beings. He asks, "And why, for us, our sense antennae are not bound by the Blind and the Opaque and the Silent, and sniff beyond what is within us? And that we do not know also embeds itself in our little corner to ingest the drunk-death of our small self [Moi]/*Et pourquoi les antennes de nos sens, à nous, ne sont-elles pas bornées par l'Aveugle et l'Opaque et le Silence, et flairent-elles au-delà de ce qui est de chez nous? Et que ne savons-nous aussi nous incruster dans notre petit coin pour y cuver l'ivre-mort de notre petit Moi?*" (Laforgue 1986c, II 439)? In suggesting that humans could have antennae, the narrator disavows the human eye and questions conventional beliefs regarding our sensory experience. He admires perception that is born out of blindness ("aveugle"), deafness ("silence") and stillness that calms the turmoil of our isolated sense of self ("cuver l'ivre-mort de notre petit Moi"). Perhaps, we could experience the world in a manner similar to crustaceans whose antennae stretch further than our limited realm of knowledge. The understanding that diverse species of animals perceived differently from each other negated the belief in a single, uniform perception.

Similarly, Derrida points out that many species of animals sense through traces of a scent or sound, and that they will go back over the same path

multiple times to pick up the traces. He asks, “Why this zone of sensibility is so neglected or reduced to a secondary position in philosophy and the arts?” (2008, 55). Further parallels could be drawn between the philosopher and poet in terms of the concept of the *Moi*. Derrida asks, “How to welcome or liberate so many animal-words [*animots*] *chez moi*? In me, for me, like me” (2008, 37). In describing the death of the “small self,” Laforgue indicates that one’s identity must encapsulate the larger web of existence, and the process of writing, reading or creating is a dance between oneself and other animals. While Laforgue does not mention the specific type of tracking discussed in Derrida’s work, he does acknowledge that there could be multiple means of sensory understanding, shared across a variety of species. This diversity of perception paralleled the mission of the *avant-garde*, which fractured the construct of a uniform vision.

This section will discuss the ways in which revolutionary evolutionary theories of vision, in particular those of sea animals, contributed to this theory of impressionism. In a letter to Charles Ephrussi (December 12, 1883), Laforgue writes:

I picked myself up and in one night from ten at night to four in the morning, like Jesus in the Garden of Olives, Saint John at Pathos, Plato at Cape Samnium, Buddha under the Gaya fig tree, I wrote in ten pages the metaphysical principles to the new Aesthetic; an aesthetic in accordance with the Hartmann’s unconscious, Darwin’s transformation, Helmholtz’s work./

Je me suis recueilli et dans une nuit de 10 du soir à 4 du matin, tel Jésus au Jardin des Oliviers, S. Jean à Pathos; Platon à Cap Samnium, Bouddha sous le figuier de Gaya, j’ai écrit en dix pages les principes métaphysiques de l’Esthétique nouvelle; une esthétique qui s’accorde avec l’inconscient de Hartmann, le transformisme de Darwin, les travaux de Helmholtz. (Laforgue 1986c, II 850)

The poet considers himself to be a religious apostle whose mission is to unify evolutionary, psychological and physiological theories of vision to explain impressionistic painting. For the poet, impressionism is not only an aesthetic; it is a scientific breakthrough and a spiritual quest.

Laforgue explains the novelty of impressionism by arguing that the artists experienced a physiological transformation of the eye. The impressionist “is able to recreate the natural eye, to see naturally and paint naïvely as he sees/est parvenu à se refaire un œil naturel, à voir naturellement et à peindre naïvement comme il voit” (Laforgue 1986b, III 329). According to this myth, the artists painted objects in the blurry, colorful manner that they actually saw them. This idea is certainly not new and can be found in

Zola's novel *L'Oeuvre* as well as the popular press, which claimed that the artists suffered from eye disorders (Thomson 1889, 190). However, "re-create the natural eye" indicates that the impressionist eye physically devolves into a nonhuman, state.⁵

Laforgue rejects rationalism and, like Deleuze, argues that true art cannot be understood on an intellectual level. Rather, it occurs on a visceral level that shocks and stimulates change in the viewer or reader. Postimpressionist paintings impact the viewer on a physiological level and can alter one's perception of the world. According to Deleuze, the impressionists completely twisted perception, creating a "crack in the skull [*fend le crane*]," a way of thinking that is utterly new (Deleuze and Parnet 1988). Because impressionist works looked very different from past works of art and contemporary Salon paintings, they are often considered to evoke a perception that is "completely new." Deleuze argues that this innovative transformation is caused by a physical shock that liberates the physical eye from previous ways of seeing: "It's our own eye which, through the painting, liberates itself from its organic structure, loses in some sort its consistence and its fixity, and circulates in the entirety of one's being" (in Bouaniche 2010, 209).

This theory thus indicates that impressionist works contain a certain organic power, impacting the physical body, to demolish previous ways of seeing. Like Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, Laforgue's analysis of impressionism fits within the framework of Deleuze's general philosophical project. Deleuze revolts against the systematic unification, rationalization and crystallization of ideas. He instead embraces the possibility of inventing "new possibilities of living" (Deleuze and Guattari 1991, 106). Revolutionary art, for Deleuze, disassembles stagnant societal structures to pave the way for the new, acting upon the body to create new physical sensations (Deleuze 2002, 25). This calamity is the "becoming-animal of man. In this becoming, the entire body tends to escape from itself" (Deleuze 2002, 20). This escape from the known and from the conventional human form allows the possibility of creative freedom.

Laforgue argues that, rather than imposing outdated artistic theories onto the canvas, the artist should paint according to the "natural perspective" of his physical eye and colors of the object in front of him: "The forms obtained not by outline drawing but only by the vibrations and contrasts of color; theoretical perspective replaced by the natural perspective of vibrations and color contrasts/*Les formes obtenues non par le dessin-contour mais uniquement par les vibrations et les contrastes de la*

couleur; la perspective théorique remplacée par la perspective naturelle des vibrations et des contrastes des couleurs" (Laforgue 1986b, III 329). Ironically, although the author disavows theoretical perspectives, the reference to color contrasts comes from the optical theories of Michel Eugène Chevreul, which influenced impressionist and postimpressionist painters.

The poet thus affirms an art that is both biologically simple and infinitely complex. Interestingly, although the poet proposes a simple or reductive art which would prune away any illusions or ornamentation, Dottin-Orsini has labeled his work as part of a scientific aesthetic, which includes "all that makes the universe and the ego crumble in a swirl of particles and an infinitely moving kaleidoscope/*tout ce qui émiette l'univers et le moi en un tourbillon de particules, et en fait un kaléidoscope infiniment mouvant*" (1988, 27). Although Laforgue presents the possibility of a way of seeing that rejects all cultural knowledge, this citation points out that Laforgue's ideas also rely on scientific discoveries. The poet proposes an aesthetic that is at once complicated and simple, scientific and naïve, urban and natural, and multiple and individuated.

Laforgue argued that the impressionists had a special ability to perceive subtle contrasts and variations, which integrates both Darwin's and Helmholtz's findings on the eye. Specifically, he believed that academic and impressionist artists' eyes are physiologically different from one another:

Whereas the academic sees things placed in their respective planes according to an assemblage reducible to a purely theoretical drawing, he [the impressionist] sees the perspective established by the thousand nothings of tones and strokes, by the varieties of states and semblances in their immobile but stirring plane. In sum, the impressionist eye is the most advanced eye in human evolution, which has captured and expressed the most complicated combinations of nuances known to date./

Où l'académique voit les choses se plaçant à leurs plans respectifs réguliers selon une carcasse réductible à un pur dessin théorique, il [l'impressionniste] voit la perspective établie par les mille riens de tons et de touches, par les variétés d'états d'air suivant leur plan non immobile mais remuant. En somme l'œil impressionniste est dans l'évolution humaine l'œil le plus avancé, celui qui juste qu'ici a saisi et a rendu les combinaisons de nuances les plus compliquées connues. (Laforgue, OC III 330–331)

Laforgue claims that impressionists and academics operate on different planes of perception. This idea is similar to that of Jakob von Uexküll, who theorizes that all species have their own specific spatiotemporal world called the "*Umwelt*," in which they perceive differently. Laforgue's writing may enhance contemporary animal studies regarding the similarities and differences between human and animal perception by illustrating how new developments in the natural sciences contributed to artistic revolutions. Born in 1864, four years after Laforgue, Uexküll was a German ethologist and founder of biosemiotics who argued that the concept of "the world" was human-centered and did encapsulate the wide variety of sensorial experiences of multiple species. His first work *Guide to the Experimental Biology of Aquatic Animals* was published in 1905. Given that Uexküll was working in the same milieu as Laforgue and also observing aquatic creatures, it is not surprising to discover striking similarities in their writings.

They shared a similar interest in animal perception, arguing that each species' understanding of its environment differs based on its unique plane of visual, tactile, spatial and temporal perceptions. The recent publication of a new English translation of Uexküll's *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning* (originally published in 1934 and republished in 2010) will also be helpful to this discussion. This text is considered a foundational work in contemporary animal studies, influencing the theories of Deleuze, Guattari and Giorgio Agamben.

Uexküll's observations deny the anthropocentric assumption of a singular conception of external reality. "We comfort ourselves too easily with the illusion that the relations of another kind of subject to the things of its environment play out in the same space and time as the relations that link us to the things of our human environment. This illusion is fed by the belief in the existence of one and only one world in which all living beings are encased" (Uexküll 2010, Location No. 583). In a series of images, Uexküll demonstrates how, depending on the eye or eyespot of the animal, a clear perspective of a city street would seem like a series of fauvist splotches to a fly and like an abstract painting to a mollusk. Agamben writes, "Uexküll's books sometimes contain illustrations that try to suggest how a segment of the human world would appear from the point of view of a hedgehog, a bee, a fly, or a dog. The experiment is useful for the disorienting effect it produces in the reader, who is suddenly obliged to look at the most familiar places with a nonhuman eye" (2004, 59). The ability to see from the perspective of an animal offers a fascinating, alternate view of the world. Laforgue explains that such shifts in perception are

the driving force behind the avant-garde. Uexküll writes that the number of visual elements differs greatly from animal to animal, which changes the “mosaic” of their perception of their environment. “The coarser the mosaic, the greater the loss of the details of the living things, and the world seen through a fly’s eye must seem significantly coarsened compared to its being seen through a human eye” (Uexküll 2010, Location No. 659). Uexküll compares the visual abilities of various animals to diverse camera lenses or reducing and enlarging a photo, articulating the clear link between a keener understanding of animal perception and artistic innovation. For Laforgue, the blurry and distorted paintings of the impressionists were, in fact, created from the perspective of a nonhuman eye. The knowledge that various species saw things differently from each other suggested the subjectivity of human perception as well. Such an idea was highly subversive because it not only overturned the power of the Salon over independent artists, but also questioned the assumed superiority of human beings over animals.

Although clearly Laforgue’s understanding of the eye is, in essence, pseudoscience, one can detect a parallelism between his writings and those of Darwin.⁶ Darwin acknowledged that even the most primitive creatures respond to light, and even the eyes of insects are, in fact, highly developed (Johnson 2007, 22). However, Darwin argues that scientists have found large variations in the eyes of animals within the same taxon, whereas one is more primitive and the other is more advanced. These differences can be attributed to evolution:

In certain crustaceans for instance, there is a double cornea, the inner one divided into facets; within each of which there is a lens-shaped swelling. In other crustaceans the transparent cones which are coated by pigment and which properly act only by excluding lateral pencils of light; are convex at their upper ends, and must act by convergence; and at the lower ends there seems to be an imperfect vitreous substance. (Darwin 2010, 340)

In other words, due to evolutionary developments, some crustaceans see in a complex manner and others see in a simple manner. Darwin’s description of the eyes of different kinds of crustaceans is similar to Laforgue’s imagined understanding of the eyes of different kinds of artists. The advanced crustacean is similar to the impressionist who sees “complicated combinations of nuances,” according to Laforgue. In contrast, the academic eye could be compared to lower crustaceans whose eyes are “imperfect,” according to Darwin.

Laforgue's argument also echoes the work of Helmholtz. In *Treatise on Physiological optics*, Helmholtz categorizes eyes into two groups: those that only distinguish between light and darkness, and those that can see form as well. In the animals who can only detect lightness and darkness: "This is probably the case of the 'eyespots' of the lowest forms of animal life (annelids, intestinal worms, starfish, sea-urchins, jellyfish, infusoria, etc.). The only essential purpose for this is a nerve sensitive to light, the peripheral end of this nerve is surrounded by pigment of another and is thus rendered visible" (Helmholtz 1924, 1). In terms of animals that can distinguish form, "the ability to do this requires the apparatus of separate nerve fibers in order to perceive light coming from separate luminous points" (Helmholtz 1924, 1). Laforgue divides artists into two similar groups: "Where the academic only sees white light [...], the impressionist sees it bathed not in dead white, but in thousands of vibrant combats, of rich prismatic decompositions/*Où l'académique ne voit que la lumière blanche [...] l'impressionniste la voit baignant tout non de morte blancheur, mais de mille combats vibrants, de riches décompositions prismatiques*" (Laforgue 1986b, 330). It would seem that the simple, "black and white" vision of the academic artist is akin to the perception of Helmholtz's jellyfish or starfish. In contrast, the impressionist represents an animal that can perceive form because he or she recognizes multiple points of light in kaleidoscopic patterns. This comparison makes "At the Berlin Aquarium" difficult to interpret.

If the poem lauds the vision of the most basic aquatic animals such as starfish and Laforgue's art criticism argues that an artist must "become primitive once again" (Laforgue 1986b, 330), why is "the impressionist eye the most advanced in human evolution" (Laforgue 1986b, 330–331)? Dottin-Orsini calls the Laforguian interpretation of the impressionist eye paradoxically "prehistoric" and "of tomorrow" because in returning to a prehistoric way of seeing, the artist may experience true originality (Dottin-Orsini 1988, 27). Laforgue explains this contradiction: "This is because the eye, beginning by appropriating, refining and systematizing its faculties, lived and educated itself; found itself in the illusion created by centuries of works of art that its evolution as an organ of luminous vibrations was delayed compared to the ear [...] / *C'est parce que l'œil, après avoir commencé par s'approprier, raffiner et systématiser les facultés tactiles a vécu et s'est instruit, s'est entretenu dans l'illusion par les siècles d'œuvres dessinées que son évolution comme organe des vibrations lumineuses s'est si retardée relativement à celle de l'oreille*" (Laforgue 1986b, 330). Thus, for

Laforgue, the so-called cultural evolution has slowed down physiological evolution and impeded the eye's natural expression. The solution is perhaps to return to the “source,” to our biological ancestors who apparently saw in a more unconditioned way. Laforgue writes, “One has to become primitive again by getting rid of tactile illusions, a natural eye forgets tactile illusions and his convenient dead language [...] Such are the first characteristics of the impressionist eye/*Il faut redevenir primitif en se débarrassant des illusions tactiles, un œil naturel oublie les illusions tactiles et sa commode langue morte [...] Telle est cette première caractéristique de l'œil impressionniste*” (Laforgue 1986b, 330).

Laforgue’s proposition of “becoming primitive again” is an example of atavistic reversion, discussed at length in Darwin’s *The Descent of Man*. In the first section of *The Descent of Man*, Darwin highlights many physical features that may be apparent in human beings at some point of their lives, which are vestiges of an earlier stage in their evolution. When unused, the organ is typically reduced in size in future generations (Darwin 1871, 19). While all embryos possess a tail, only a small percentage of humans possess certain atavistic traits, such as canine teeth or a Woolnerian tip, an inward fold on the ear that exists in primates (Darwin 1871, 325). Darwin’s argument that some humans can have primitive traits not found in members of our same species buttresses Laforgue’s belief that impressionists and academics possess eyes that are at different evolutionary stages.

As I will elaborate upon in the following chapter, Darwin’s theory of descent correlated with anxieties about cultural and moral decline in the *fin de siècle*. Individuals marginalized due to class, activities, beliefs or overall appearance were sometimes deemed as more animalistic than others. Predating Darwin’s account of regression, psychiatrist Bénédict Augustin Morel’s *Treatise on Physical, Intellectual and Moral Degeneration of the Human Species* (1857) considers degeneracy as an inherited pathological deviance from the norm. Whereas Cesare Lombroso applied this concept to criminology, arguing that criminality was a congenital defect in individuals who possessed atavistic traits, Max Nordau expands the definition of degenerates to include artists and writers. Writing in what he perceives to be a period of societal and cultural decline, Nordau argues that *fin de siècle* artworks are “productions of a shattered brain” that have been corrupting a generation (Nordau 1968, 227). According to Nordau, avant-garde artists had regressive traits (Nordau 1968, 227). Claiming that the frenzy of modern life had contributed to weariness and the breaking down of the social order, Nordau contended that *fin de siècle* culture

was in a state of decay. Nordau was not the only one. Social Darwinism's attempts to apply Darwinian principles such as competition of resources, as Herbert Spencer called "survival of the fittest," is a common theme in French Decadent literature. A multitude of texts such as Paul Bourget's *Le Disciple* (1889) link Darwinism to French society. Social Darwinism was used to justify free market capitalism and political conservatism in addition to colonialist and imperialist ideologies. Degeneration was a means of describing decay in the social order, including a perceived rise of crime, in the beginning of the Third Republic (Belot 2013, 17). According to Nordau, certain artists who were supposedly physiologically and morally degenerate were responsible for this generational decline. Nordau situates impressionists, who allegedly experience life only through "nerve vibrations," rather than "general knowledge," within this camp (Nordau 1968, 487).⁷

In his defense of the impressionists, Laforgue defends sensory experience over acquired knowledge and "dead language" (Laforgue 1986b, 330). A concrete example would be that if a person looks at one side of a tree, the physical eye would see the tree as flat because it could only see that particular side. However, if one is taught by others or by personal experience that the tree is round, he will see the tree as round.⁸ This understanding of physiological optics was highly dependent on the understanding of the ways in which animal eyes function. Laforgue's insistence on gazing through the eyes of an animal at once denies both *human* and *humanist* perspectives, which are rooted in tradition and knowledge.

Instead, for Laforgue, art arises out of instinct and basic physiological processes. The poet demystifies creativity and strips the artist of his privileged status of being more talented than other creatures (Dufour 1904, 22–23). Echoing the evolutionary scientists of the nineteenth century, Laforgue writes, "The transcendent force pushes Beethoven to compose, Delacroix to look for tones of colors, Baudelaire to riffle through his language, Hugo to be enormous, Darwin to declare natural selection, and that which pushes Pasteur, Berthelot to research, Goethe to guess flowers, Cuvier to reconstitute fossils/*La force transcendante pousse Beethoven à chanter, Delacroix à chercher des tons, Baudelaire à fouiller sa langue, Hugo à être énorme, Darwin à constater la sélection naturelle, et celle qui pousse Pasteur, Berthelot à chercher, Gœthe à devenir les fleurs, Cuvier à reconstituer des fossiles*" (Laforgue 1986b, 357). This transcendent force (*force transcendante*) is, according to Laforgue, "the same that pushes a spider to make its web and, if one tears it down, to make it again until it's

exhausted/*la même qui pousse l'araignée à faire sa toile et, si on la déchire, la faire et la refaire jusqu'à épuisement*” (Laforgue 1986b, 357). The idea that a force propels the individual to perform great artistic acts renders the creative act as beyond human control. “Above humanity, the Law follows its reflexive development and the unconscious breathes where it wants/*Au dessus de la humanité, la Loi suit son développement réflexe et l'inconscient souffle où il veut*” (Laforgue 1986b, 334). This “transcendent force” is similar to the Lamarckian conception of the “*force vitale*,” an alchemical power derived from the fluids in organisms. Lamarck argued that the spontaneous motion of these fluids caused creatures to develop and adapt. Siding with Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and the transformativists over the conservativists, Laforgue believes that this energy even propelled Cuvier to find fossils, which the scientist believed disproved Lamarck’s theory of transformation.

Although Lamarck’s theory was discredited, Laforgue believed that this life force was operating in all creatures—both human and nonhuman. He radically places the most talented thinkers, musicians and artists of his time at the same level as animals and equals a Delacroix painting to a spider’s web. The poet redefines the concept of art to include beautiful, nonrational, seemingly spontaneous works that may be created by nonhuman animals. Laforgue’s writings indicate an ideological shift in the way we view innovation while eroding the majoritarian investment in the human.

Art is often perceived as a “noble” higher pursuit that is superior to base instincts. However, as Aloï writes, “if we consider *creativity* as the universal originator of all art, then we find that animals are surely capable of displaying that, at times in ways that indeed border on the understanding of the creative in humans” (Aloï 2011, xvii). What are the stakes in adopting such a paradigm? It desanctifies cultural institutions, undermines our assumed superiority and tears down our investment in being human. Instead of being encased in chic galleries for an elite few, art is found within us all—rushing through our veins, respiring through our lungs and flowing through our fingers. It is the source of all beauty and of all life.

4.3 VISIONS OF THE ORIENT

The Decadents also embraced non-Western philosophies and art to expand their creative consciousness. For Laforgue, the sea creatures are like Buddhist sages who “exhausted all the senses, all the temperaments, all the

metaphysics/*avaient épuisé tous les sens, tous les tempéraments, toutes les métaphysiques*" of the human possibilities and have achieved Enlightenment. Eastern religion offered a new perspective to the Western avant-garde that felt jaded by Christianity (Mabuchi 1988, 35). Laforgue himself was intrigued by the idea of Buddhism as a viable alternative to what he felt was the oppressive influence of Christianity. Laforgue's poetic desire for Nirvana, borrowed from the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, reinforces the myth of a primordial, pure or natural state of being that transcends all earthly realms.⁹ In Sanskrit, the word Nirvana means blown out or extinguished. As Daniel Grojnowski discusses Laforgue, "The only salvation that is offered to the individual is the extinction of the consciousness, the annihilation of the ego in Nirvana/*Le seul salut qui s'offre à l'individu est l'extinction de la conscience, l'annihilation du Moi dans un nirvana*" (Mabuchi 1988, 27). Nirvana is an annihilation of previous understanding in order to come into a sense of oneness with all living things (Capriles 2000, 146). Such is the experience of transcending metaphysical illusions that inhibit the physical functioning of the body in its "natural" state—supposedly the way in which a nonhuman animal does. Alan Watts, a twentieth-century scholar of Eastern philosophy, writes:

A floor of many colored pebbles lies beneath clear water, with fish at first noticed only by their shadows, hanging motionless or flashing through the liquid, ever-changing net of sunlight. We can watch it for hours, taken clear out of time and our own urgent history, by a scene which has been going on just like this for perhaps two million years. At times, it catches us right below the heart with an ache of nostalgia and delight compounded, when it seems that this is, after all, the world of the sane, enduring reality from which we are somehow in exile. (Watts 1991, 1)

Watts illustrates the connection between aquariums and meditation, where one is given a glimpse of timeless or primordial state only to become more aware of and man's separation from that possibility.

Laforgue's use of the word "seeing" indicates that the development of one's visual perception is directly related to one's spiritual development. If animals are supposedly in a spiritual state, the more a person is able to see like an animal, the more spiritual he becomes. By privileging sponges and plasma that do not even have eyes, the author advocates an intuitive perception based on sensory response; the highest ideal goes beyond reliance on the physical eye. This notion may seem incongruent with the author's

advocacy of pure perception and observation. The vision which Laforgue suggests here is a “higher sight” that is more animal-like than human—like the arthropod that feels with its antennae better than it sees with its eyes. Laforgue writes, “The simple law of universal natural selection indicates a divine tendency in itself/*La simple loi de la sélection naturelle universelle indique une tendance divine en soi*” (Laforgue 1986b, 340), illustrating a new concept of the divine.

Aquatic life in Laforgue’s *oeuvre* could represent a powerful force that destroys old ways of perceiving. One could compare this idea to that of Deleuze, who discusses the impact of revolutionary art on the eye of the viewer, rather than only the artist. For Deleuze, art can contribute to the process of “becoming animal” or mutation and transformation, which breaks free from societal limits. Deleuze gives the examples the “germative force” of Cezanne’s apples or van Gogh’s sunflowers (Deleuze 2002, 27). This Leibnizian image of a piece of a fruit seed carries the tremendous potential to transform into something else. Thus, great art, as a powerful stimulant, has the potential to liberate the viewer from stagnant thought, cultural conditioning and the deadening weight of history that limits creative freedom.

In addition to discussing enlightened seeing, Laforgue borrows from the Hindu myth of Vishnu’s dream (Eliade 1987, 432). The poet discusses the serpents and aquatic creatures “all in the dream of water.” According to the Hindu religion, the creator-sustainer god Vishnu sleeps on a thousand-headed serpent, which floats upon the ocean. While he is asleep, he has a dream, and that dream is the universe. Everything and everyone in the universe are actually Vishnu dreaming the dream of separation. Like the Ophite in the book of Genesis, this serpent reminds us of our separation, real or illusory, from the natural world. As a constructed natural wonderland, the aquarium gives the narrator hope for oneness once again.

Haraway’s elucidation that nature is not a physical place, but “it is a *topos*, a rhetorician’s place, a commonplace. It is a figure, construction, artifact, movement, displacement” (Haraway 2003, 65) will help deepen our reading of Laforgue’s poem. According to Haraway, when tourists seek to visit nature, they have a difficult time finding it (Haraway 2003, 65). Since the industrial era, the concept of nature in urban society is relegated to the discursive field: to poetry, art, fiction and theory. This idea reinforces this chapter’s central argument that the aquarium represented a new role for art and literature to provide access to imagined aquatic para-

dises far beneath the confines of civilization. Haraway critiques the narratives about nature and primitivism that Laforgue and other modernists constructed. "Every story that begins with original innocence, the return to wholeness, imagines the drama of life to be individuation, separation, the birth of the self, the tragedy of autonomy, the fall into writing, alienation, that is war, tempered by the imaginary bosom of the Other" (Haraway 1991, 177).

The devastating isolation and individuation of modern life inspires the myth of "original innocence, the return to wholeness." The religious references in Laforgue's text, such as the Garden of Eden, allude to this myth of wholeness that perhaps combats the difficulties of modern, urban life. Similarly, the tempering of the "bosom of the Other" suggests the tendency for modern city dwellers to turn to borrowed narratives for comfort. The borrowed images from Asian cultures such as the "Oriental sages" and the "Buddha" symbolize this need for nourishment in urban life. One role of the avant-garde artist during the late nineteenth century was to utilize non-Western forms in order to rediscover a sense of magic within a deadening society (Straw 2000, 18). It is not coincidental that the building that is currently the National Immigration Museum in Palais de la Porte Dorée, built for the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, also houses a tropical aquarium, next to a Buddhist temple and a zoological park (Fig. 4.5). Clearly, like in Laforgue's poem, zoos, aquariums, foreigners and Eastern spirituality were associated with each other during colonialist expansion.

At the 1867 *Exposition Universelle*, in the midst of frenetic exhibitions on coins and currency, the discovery of electricity and the history of industry, the tranquil Japanese Pavilion gave shelter to lithographed fish, crustaceans, insects and birds. Japan fascinated the French public, as it had been closed off to other countries during a part of the Edo period from 1636 to 1853 (Mabuchi 1988, 3). After Japanese trade ports were forced to reopen, Europe became inundated with imports including fans, kimonos and woodblock prints. These prints became instrumental in shaping French impressionist and postimpressionist work. Although most French artists had not been to Japan, van Gogh, Gauguin, Degas, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Cassatt all incorporated Japanese techniques to create *Japoniste* paintings (Fig. 4.4). Laforgue was a fan of Japanese art, writing in 1882, "If I had money, I would collect ceramics, Japanese works and the acute canvases of the impressionists/*Si j'avais de l'argent, je collectionnerais des céramiques, des japonais, des toiles aiguës des impressionnistes*" (Dottin-Orsini 1988, 15). In addition, Dottin-Orsini writes that



Fig. 4.4 Utagawa Hiroshige. Hirame and Mebaru Fish with Cherry Blossoms, from the series *Uozukushi*, Every Variety of Fish, 1840s. [Metmuseum.org](https://www.metmuseum.org). United States Public Domain

Laforgue appreciated Japanese and English art, as well as works by Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes and the impressionnistes (1988, 18). The masters of the Ukiyo-e school provided French artists with a new perspective, offering asymmetrical and cropped compositions, empty spaces and decorative motifs involving plants and animals. The Ukiyo-e school's "floating world" depicted everyday subjects including sumo wrestlers, Kabuki dancers and geishas. The Ukiyo-e school encapsulated these urbanites under cherry blossoms, next to giant ocean waves or gazing into koi ponds. The nineteenth-century French interest in the transitory "floating world," which integrates organic and urban life, can parallel that of the public aquarium.

Simply leafing through collections of prints of roaring tidal waves and languid rivers in vibrant blue ink by artists such as Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) is like visiting an aquarium itself. Japanese prints can be a veritable menagerie of aquatic life. Félix Bracquemond, the lithographer and porcelain worker who is said to have started the *Japoniste* movement



Fig. 4.5 Claire Nettleton. *Sign at Porte Dorée*. No copyright

in France, collected a series of nine prints of fish by Utagawa Hiroshige (1787–1858) (Hinson 1975, 123). The sea, as portrayed in Japanese woodblock prints, represented a harmonic and fantastical utopia to French artists.

However, is the consummation and appropriation of the foreign much different from containing exotic animals in aquariums? The borrowed images from Asian cultures such as the Oriental sages and the reference to Buddha in Laforgue's poem symbolize a need for nourishment in urban life. The idea that modern European culture could not fulfill one's psychic or spiritual needs can also be seen in French art during this time. By appropriating Japanese techniques and images into their artwork, French artists express an alternative perspective not only of everyday life, but also of man's relationship to the natural world. Woodblock prints often depict enormous tsunami waves and towering cliffs where humans are either absent or represented as small by comparison. *Japonisme* reflects a shift from anthropocentric thinking. "It was at this precise moment when

Occidental culture sought to establish a new kind of relationship with its natural milieu, so it became aware of the way in which the Japanese captured nature in their art" (Ramsey 1953, 33). *Japoniste* painters attempted to portray the human character as a part of nature and not as separate, as opposed to traditional French art where man is usually considered dominant over plants and animals. According to Ary Renan (1857–1900), a French Symbolist painter, Japanese art has:

A predilection for animals that occupies such a small place in our art. Our races have always had their noses turned up, in some sort. They see only the sublime; they have only for a short time been aware of the external world and the inferior beings who, however, inhabit the earth as much as we do./

Une préférence pour la bête qui occupe dans notre art si peu de place. Nos races ont toujours eu, en quelque sorte, le visage tourné vers en haut. Elles ne voient que le sublime; elles n'aperçoivent que depuis bien peu de temps le monde extérieur et les êtres inférieurs qui peuplent cependant de la terre au même titre que nous. (Ary Renan in Mabuchi 1988, 40)

With the exception of *nature morte* by painters such as Jean-Baptise Oudry (1686–1755) that displayed animals gutted and hung for human consumption, animals are for the most part missing from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French painting. Creating a binary between French and Japanese worldview, Renan laments the assumed superiority over animals in French culture. He advocates for a supposedly Japanese perception of the equality of all living creatures.

The perception of human-animal oneness as being akin to Buddhism, especially in the context of aquatic life, still exists today. In his discussion of the physiological impact of deep-sea diving on the human body, contemporary journalist James Nestor writes that the look in the eyes of the divers who plunge hundreds of feet "is the same in the eyes of Buddhist monks or emergency room patients who have died and then been resuscitated minutes later. Those who have made it to the other side" (Nestor 2015, Location No. 71). Additionally, as the mind shuts down, "the senses numb, and synapses slow. The brain enters a heavily meditative state" (Nestor 2015, Location No. 119). Nestor's argument is that freediving flips the Master Switch of Life, a term coined by scientist Per Scholander in 1963, which is a multitude of reflexes of the lungs, brain and heart (Nestor 2015, Location No. 82). As divers descend deeper,

these reflexes become more pronounced, enabling the body to function underneath tremendous pressure and extreme conditions. Nestor writes that experienced divers can access this Master Switch more easily and essentially become the “efficient deep sea diving animals” we once were millions of years ago (Nestor 2015, Location No. 86). One of the dormant reflexes that freedivers experience is the dolphin-like ability to echo-locate by using sound vibrations to identify nearby objects in the dark depths of the ocean. Sharing many similarities to Laforgue’s writings over a century ago, Nestor’s account illustrates that the deep sea may activate modes of perception in humans from earlier stages in their evolution. However, in Laforgue’s poetry we only venture into a simulacrum of the sea and run into the danger as viewing all non-Westerns as less “evolved.”

In the three main sections of this chapter, we have seen how modern fiction represents aquariums as both underwater bunker and submarine—sheltering urbanites from the hectic and fetid city and transporting them to foreign shores. As the Berlin Aquarium was first to produce saltwater that could sustain oceanic life from all over the world, foreign animals, paradoxical narratives of colonialism, Orientalism and industrial progress are necessarily embedded in its literary representations. That said, we should not discount the inspiring splendor of oceanic life, which could expand our view of beauty beyond that which is produced by humans. The meandering eels and fields of orange, velveteen sponges of which Laforgue speaks in *Salomé* inspired stunning imagery and dreams of communicating with aquatic wildlife (Laforgue 1986c, 438).¹⁰

David Lynch, a contemporary avant-garde film director and artist, describes his own creative process and Transcendental Meditation practice in a similar manner: “Ideas are like fish. If you want to catch little fish, you can stay in the shallow water. But if you want to catch the big fish, you’ve got to go deeper. Down deep, the fish are more powerful and more pure. They’re huge and abstract. And they’re very beautiful” (Lynch 2007, 1). Lynch believes that the truly innovative artist must plunge beneath the surface of the everyday human experience. From Laforgue to Lynch, artists and theorists from the nineteenth century to today have argued that creativity is shared with and inspired by animal—and often oceanic—species. The myth of the “artist as animal” can involve a physiological transformation, which shatters previous ways of seeing, reflecting and experiencing. Laforgue’s belief that avant-gardists possess a natural eye would explain why postimpressionist painters such as Rousseau or Gauguin paint their subjects as flat rather than giving the illusion of depth perception. However,

as this philosophy was based on the theories of Darwin and Helmholtz, who compare the eyes of different crustaceans as either advanced or primitive, is the impressionist painter the former or the latter? It would seem that the vision of the avant-gardist might be naïve and crude. However, for Laforgue, this vision is actually superior to that of the academic painter whose eyes have been so tainted by rigid conceptions that they miss the mystery and splendor of the outside world. It is also puzzling why the artifice of the glass aquarium is necessary to mediate between the gaze of the viewer and the creature being viewed. “Impressionism” argues against cultural institutions such as museums and art schools because they restrict creative freedom, and, instead, Laforgue proposes a more “natural” setting for painting and exhibiting. However, “At the Berlin Aquarium” affirms the institution of the aquarium, which restricts the freedom of animals and does not allow them to roam freely. Perhaps the natural world can be so mystifying, perplexing or even threatening that most civilized human beings cannot understand it directly. According to Laforgue, it is only through the frame of the aquarium, the painting or the poem that a person can truly discover a connection between himself and animals.

NOTES

1. Cuvier is discussed in the section *Fureur geneïsque de l'art* in *Impressionisme*. Laforgue argued that a transcendent force pushed “Cuvier to reconstitute fossils,” which I will discuss later in this chapter (147). In terms of the debate between Cuvier and Saint-Hilaire, Laforgue is obviously on the side of transformism, arguing that a Lamarckian vital force caused Cuvier’s research. Laforgue’s correspondence with Théodore Lindenlaub mentions Lohengrin, most probably referring to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’s article “La première de Lohnengrin” on February 15th.
2. As we will examine later in this chapter, Laforgue constructs a dichotomy between two different types of humans who are evolving in different ways, the impressionist versus the academic. In “Le Miracle des Roses,” Laforgue quotes Darwin’s study of two types of touch-me-not plants, adding, “The other sowed by sensitive ones behaved in a different manner/*L’autre semis de Sensitives se comporte d’une manière un peu différente*” (1986c, 586). For Laforgue, the avant-gardist is a sensitive soul that behaves and functions differently from others. The quote is found in Darwin’s lesser-known book *The Power of Movement in Plants* (1880). The French translation is quoted in Laforgue’s epigraph for “Le Miracle des Roses” in *Molarités légendaires* (published posthumously in 1920).

3. "And the Obscene Mysteries of Cybele/*Et les mystères Obscènes de Cybèle*" (Laforgue 1986a, 606). The last line of the poem was not included in the 1903 edition of the poem.
4. In the *Book of Revelation*, the riders of the Four Horses of the Apocalypse represent conquest, war, famine or death—the end of humanity as we know it. The term “apocalypse” in ancient Greek means “an uncovering,” typically an understanding of divine secrets that can help one comprehend earthly realities.
5. One should note the lexical field of “naturally” and “naïvely” and “natural,” which can be defined as “that which has not been made, modified or altered by man.” “*Qui n'a pas été fabriqué, modifié, traité par l'homme*” (*Le Grand Robert*, 876).
6. Critics of Darwin have used the topic of the eye for centuries to combat his theory of evolution. One of their arguments is that an eye of a vertebrate is too complex to have evolved from Darwinian natural selection. Creationists argue that the eye could not have appeared by slight variations and developments over the course of millions of years. Darwin himself understood the skepticism about this idea. Darwin wrote in chapter six of *The Origin of Species*, “To suppose that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest possible degree” (337). However, Darwin did believe that the eye could have developed by numerous, slight modifications because even single-celled organisms contain parts of their cells that are sensitive to light, and these parts could have evolved into eyes (Johnson, 22).
7. “Description is the work of a brain which comprehends the things it perceives in their connection and their essence; Impressionism is the work of a brain which receives from the phenomenon only the sensuous elements and by a one-sided aspect of knowledge, but not knowledge itself. The describer recognizes in a tree, a tree, with all the ideas which this concept includes. The Impressionist sees before him merely a mass of colour composed of spots of different greens, on which the sun flashes here and there points and rays of light” (Nordau 1968, 487).
8. Uexküll tells a story of Helmholtz's childhood: He and his mother passed by a church bell tower with men working on the roof. Helmholtz asked his mother if she could take the dolls down from the roof for him. Because the men on the roof were distant, the child perceived them as small people. However, he lacked the knowledge that objects appear smaller the farther away they are. “The infant's visual space ends here with an all encompassing farthest plane. Only bit by bit do we learn to push the farthest plane

even farther with the help of distance signs until the adults' visual space ends at a distance of six to eight kilometers and the horizon begins" (Uexküll, loc 638). Distance perception is thus learned, not innate, and our experiential knowledge alters how and what we see.

9. The last line in the 1895 edition of the poem, "And the obscene mysteries of Cybele" (Laforge 1986a, 606), also suggests the return to a spiritual, pre-Christian source. Cybele was an Anatolian mother goddess described by the Greek poet Hesiod in the eighth century BC (Roller 1999, 10). Lynn Roller argues that this mother goddess was one of the earliest concepts of the divine and was a fundamental part of human development (1999, 10). The religious imagery suggests an alternative, heavenly reality that could be a refuge from modern city life. It is also yet another means of destroying previous, antiquated thought processes in order to enter into the new.
10. "my faith, making an existence there again, of stumps whose antennae blink with the coral in front of it, of a thousand endless warts; a whole fetal and claustral flora, waving the eternal dream of being able to whisper one day to mutual congratulations on this state of affairs/*ma foi, s'y refaisant une existence, de moignons dont les antennes clignent au corail d'en face, de mille verrues sans but; toute une flore foetale et claustrale et vibratile, agitant l'éternel rêve d'arriver à se chuchoter un jour de mutuelles félicitations sur cet état de choses*" (Laforge 1986c, 438).

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CHAPTER 5

Said the Spider to the Fly: The Triumph of the Minor in Octave Mirbeau's *In the Sky*

On a winding mountain peak, under the night sky covered with stars, an artist grasps his paintbrush and gazes at all creation. Finding it impossible to capture the immense heavens above him, Lucien, a character in Mirbeau's *In the Sky* who is partially based on van Gogh, studies a pile of manure swarming with insects on the ground. Whereas the greatness of the sky is paralyzing, the heap of microscopic creatures is rich with an infinite multitude of combinations. It moves like dabs of paint that drip down the canvas and breathe life into an image—blurring its colors and altering its form: “But then, if you look closer, see how the mass begins to move, to expand, to rise, groan, come to life...and with how many lives?/...quand on cligne de l’œil, voilà le tas s’anime, grandit, se soulève, grouille, devient vivant...et de combien de vies?” (Mirbeau 2015, 115; 1989, 97). Mirbeau’s focus on multiplicity (“how many lives?”) of minute creatures calls into question the supremacy of the Artist as a singular, superior human being above all life. As a narrative that seeks to explain the struggle of the postimpressionist within his own time period in terms of evolutionary processes, *In the Sky* affirms the innovative power of the minor. Rooted in the theories of Lamarck and Darwin, *In the Sky* alters the concept of the creative act being a grandiose and intellectual gesture—even the simplest and most ephemeral forms of life have the power to create, destroy and eventually transform. In this chapter, I will argue that the novel asserts the value of animals, often dismissed as marginal and

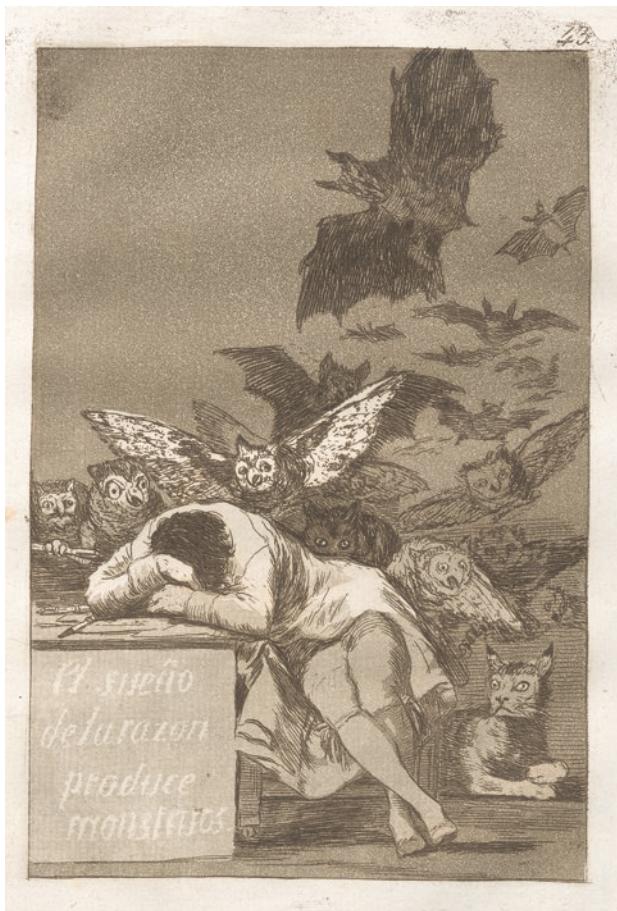


Fig. 5.1 Francisco de Goya. *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, 1799. National Gallery of Art. Open Access. Public Domain

inferior, as creative entities and Decadent antiheroes. Mirbeau's *fin de siècle* fiction (of failure) thus indicates a radical aesthetic shift that questions the authority and uniqueness of human subject (Fig. 5.1).

The unfinished novella was printed in installments in *l'Echo de Paris* from September 1892 and May 1893 and published in book form by scholars Pierre Michel and Jean-Francois Nivet in 1989. As a tale of a friendship between a writer and a painter, *In the Sky* mirrors Mirbeau's role

as a valiant defender of the works of Monet, Pissaro, Rodin, Camille Claudel and van Gogh (Michel and Nivet 1989). In this novella, Georges, the meek, solitary and desolate writer who is unable to create, is compared to a fly. Georges encounters a spider, which could possibly foreshadow his meeting with artist Lucien. Lucien is simultaneously a vicious destroyer and a skillful creator who ensnares his victims in his intricate *toile*, the same word for web and canvas. Lucien serves as a mentor and friend for Georges and teaches him to reject aesthetic theories but is unable to fit within society. He then severs his hand and shares the same fate as van Gogh.

Interweaving writing and painting, the relationship between these two artist-animals, Georges and Lucien, encapsulates the cultural and scientific shift toward the minor and its infinite becomings. The novel forgoes the top-down creationist myth where a higher entity, be it a spiritual deity or an omnipotent academy, dominates from above. Innovation instead springs from the ground and transforms—never becoming crystalized or predominant. An artist with the immeasurable potential whose radical vision is not understood—who never becomes great within his own time period—is like the larva that only grows up to be a fly. However, according to Darwin, generations later, a fly might evolve into another species. The shifting views toward creative processes during the *fin de siècle* mirrored those in evolutionary biology. As Norbert Wolf writes in his discussion of the Decadent movement, “Ever since Darwin’s theory of descent (his *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859), man no longer appeared to be sovereign over a divine creation designed around him, but a chance product of evolution” (2009, 7).

In addition, this chapter examines the place of *In the Sky*, and decadent or “degenerative literature” as a whole, within the field of contemporary animal studies. I hope to build upon John Miller’s thoughtful analysis of James Thomson’s *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874) published in 2017. The parallels between Mirbeau and Thomson’s “dark animal aesthetics” and anti-sentimental treatment of animals as antipathetic and violent creatures are striking (Miller 2017, 196). Unpolished and base, the artist-animals of the Decadence defecate on icons and inspire terror and disgust. In their defiance, they reveal that both destruction and creation are essential to the artistic process. Miller writes of Thomson, “Animality is synonymous with horror; as such it functions as a trope for a violent planet rather than a particular representation of the material lives of animals” (Miller 2017, 196). In Mirbeau’s case, animality helps expose human hypocrisy. Claire Margat, a scholar of Decadent literature, proposes that Mirbeau’s

readings of Darwin supported his anti-humanist stance and his mission to expose the cruelty of his time (2002, 35). As mentioned in the introduction, the anarchistic author revolted against the injustice of the Dreyfus Affair. He also vehemently opposed the death penalty, mandatory military service, religious corruption, class exploitation and racial prejudice (Michel and Nivet 1990, 17). Mirbeau even had to flee the country, along with artists Camille Pissarro and Théophile Steinlen, in 1894 due to mass arrests of anarchist sympathizers (Hutton 2). *In the Sky* interweaves Mirbeau's misanthropic nihilism, penchant for avant-garde aesthetics and interest in evolutionary theory to thrust humanity off its own pedestal. Similar to Miller's assessment of Thomson, Mirbeau shares contemporary animal theory's critique of human exceptionalism, but also reduces "the animal" to disgust, horror and violence—ignoring the particularities of their material lives (Miller 2017, 196–197).

As contemporary readers, we should be mindful that negative terms in the novel, such as the word "brute"—or Georges calling himself, "What a pig that I am! Dirty bastard! / *Cochon que je suis!...Salop!*!" (Mirbeau 1989, 87; 2015, 102)—may, in fact, reinforce the false division between human and nonhuman. As seen in the novel *Thérèse Raquin*, animals in post-Darwinian French literature are often associated with the vicious and unseemly parts of mankind that undermine traditional humanist discourse. Thus, Decadent representations of animals may, in fact, be empowering because these negative associations are also directly linked to creative breakthroughs. As Lucien experiences his own degeneration, he dispels the human arrogance that one can ever truly understand or replicate nature. The artist in *In the Sky*'s bestial transformations and interactions with animals are encounters with incomprehensible genius. The novella is an ode to the amateur, to the failure, to every writer who confronts a blank page or every artist waiting for beauty to emerge from the canvas, like a butterfly bursting forth from its pallid cocoon.

A forerunner of art criticism and an insurgent against close-mindedness, Mirbeau has witnessed a renaissance of contemporary interest. His works of fiction have been translated into 30 languages. Despite his popularity in recent years, the author is still considered a minor figure. His defiant works such as *Dingo* (1913) and *The Torture Garden* (1899)—replete with a bloodthirsty dog philosopher and a sadomasochist who enjoys watching torture in charming gardens—escape canonical status. Driven by an anarchist mission to "participate in the great revolution of looking/*participer à la grande révolution du regard*" (Michel and Nivet 1993, 10), Mirbeau accomplishes this task by suggesting a biological link between artists and animals.

Mirbeau affirms that animals have an aesthetic sensibility that, in some ways, surpasses conventional human taste. For example, in *Dingo*, the narrator's dog rejects a rigid and unattractive Napoleonic-era piece of furniture: "Dingo is right. This acid green that stings the eyes, it's bureaucratic-looking and lacks personality, with the disciplinary stiffness of a police station. It definitely is not beautiful/*Dingo a raison. Ce vert acide qui pique les yeux, [...] cette impersonnalité bureaucratique, cette rigidité disciplinaire de salle de police, décidément, ça n'est pas beau*" (Mirbeau 1913, 58; translations mine unless otherwise indicated). In contrast to rigid aesthetic traditions, which inherently discipline and police the way people see, beauty for Mirbeau is freedom from the tyranny of order and convention.

Michel and Nivet note the parallels between Lucien's frustration and that of Monet. Mirbeau tried to convince the impressionist not to destroy his works because of his immense talent, exclaiming, "Your paintings scratched up? What insanity!/*Vos toiles grattées? Quelle folie!*" (Mirbeau in Michel and Nivet 1989, 50–51). In one letter, written on September 10, 1887, Mirbeau writes to Monet: "I understand your anguish, your discouragements, because I do not know a sincere artist who felt them and who was not unfair, absolutely unfair, to himself/*Je comprends vos angoisses, vos découragements, parce que je ne connais pas d'artiste sincère qui ne les ait éprouvés et qui n'ait été injuste, absolument injuste vis-à-vis de lui-même*" (Mirbeau in Michel and Nivet 1989, 50–51). Michel and Nivet argue that the novel is a contradictory "a tale of aborted lives/*un récit des vies avortées*" and is plagued by an antithetical "creative impotence/*impuissance créatrice*" (Michel and Nivet 1989, 9–12). Paradoxically, as impressionism and post-impressionism are some of the most celebrated movements and van Gogh and Monet are some of the most popular artists today, the fictional Lucien's story could eventually be considered one of success. The publication of the novel—nearly 100 years after its conception—has attracted attention from contemporary scholars. An English translation was published for the first time in 2015, by Ann Sterzinger, with help from Robert Ziegler and myself.

I will build upon Ziegler's insightful analysis of *In the Sky*, which he situates within Mirbeau's "nothing machine." In contrast to the fetishistic appreciation for material possessions of the bourgeoisie, Mirbeau's literature of "nothingness" demolishes staid objects and ideologies (Ziegler, *The Nothing Machine* 2007b, 7). This violent, ravenous mechanism, which annihilates all that is established or crystalized, destroys the old thereby transforming decayed material to something new. I conceive this metamorphosis

in terms of Deleuzian and Guattarian rhizomatic processes. Creativity can grow from the smallest points in the deepest crevasses underground, reemerge, become accepted convention, decay and produce new offshoots. Like worms that burrow, resurface and then later die, the characters proceed across the fertile ground. The theorists write, “Expression must break forms, encourage ruptures and new sproutings/*L'expression doit briser les formes, marquer les ruptures et les embranchements nouveaux*” (Deleuze and Guattari 1975a, 52; 1986, 28). As Ziegler argues in his analysis of Mirbeau’s novel *Dingo*, whose protagonist is a murderous dog: “Not moving along the linear course of plodding human time, Dingo is a site of temporal confluence, where beginnings and endings coincide” (Ziegler 2007a, 239). The artist-animals in *In the Sky* often do not operate within the rational constructs of human time, human vision, human speech or human understanding.

Deleuze elucidates the force of “becoming minor” rather than the common desire to become powerful or in control. He instead equals minor status with innovation:

People always think of a majoritarian future (when I will be big, when I will have power) while the issue is that of becoming-minoritarian: not to act like, not to imitate the child, the madman, the woman, the animal, the stutterer or the foreigner, but to become all of that, to invent new forces or new weapons./

Les gens pensent toujours à un avenir majoritaire (quand je serai grand, quand j'aurai le pouvoir...). Alors que le problème est celui d'un devenir-minoritaire: non pas faire semblant, non pas faire ou imiter l'enfant, le fou, la femme, l'animal, le bégue ou l'étranger, mais devenir tout cela, pour inventer de nouvelles forces ou de nouvelles armes. (Deleuze 2008, 11)

The theorist enumerates figures that are traditionally considered to have minor status, mentioning children, foreigners, women, animals, stutterers and the mentally ill—those who do not think, behave or express themselves according to traditional paradigms. It would be, of course, insensitive and even impossible to collapse such diverse categories of being under the umbrella of “other,” but the point is to view that which is not conventional or majoritarian as having creative value. Becoming minor is not pretending to be the other, it is a physiological, and in the case of literature rhetorical, transformation, which is in flux. The degenerative literature of the *fin de siècle* of Mirbeau and Rachilde, in which people mutate into animals and men blur into women or even become plants, is an exam-

ple of “becoming minor.” The words “*forces*” and “*armes*” capture the militaristic spirit of the avant-garde, which sought to violently rout the status quo.

Violent and discarded, decadent animals are weapons against stagnant modes of thought. Ziegler writes, “Throughout the novel, Mirbeau’s use of theriomorphic imagery, his description of the peacocks, swans, dogs, and spiders that fill his characters’ world, suggest his characters’ sense of inferiority or their dreams of elevation, their retreat to a plane of animal servility or their wish to take wing and fly over the world” (Ziegler 2007b, 443). In Mirbeau’s nihilist aesthetic, the animals ground the lofty characters and return them to earth. However, I assert that, in some ways, the animals’ perceived impotence and inferiority are just as illusory as those of the artists. I believe this iconoclastic writer plays with and overturns previous conceptions of animals being inferior and highlights their intrinsic value. In addition, the novel proposes the narrative that the biological drive to create is so powerful that it effaces the importance of the intention of the artist. Rather than being superior to all other forms of life, the artist becomes a part of its complex matrix—a species among species, a worker among workers.

In one instance in the novella, inside a bourgeois dining room, a group of flies defecates on figurines of children playing with marbles to the extent that they turn black (Mirbeau 1989, 60).

Unfortunately, the flies kept leaving brownish spots on the plaster, to my family’s great chagrin. My sisters, to whom the care of this work of art had been entrusted, had tried in vain to scrape them off, to dust them over with flour, but the embarrassing stains wouldn’t disappear./

Par malheur les mouches ne cessaient de déposer, sur le plâtre, des taches brûnâtres, qui faisait la désolation de ma famille. Mes sœurs, à qui la garde de cette œuvre d’art était dévolue, avaient beau les gratter, les laver, les saupoudrer de farine, ces inconvenantes saletés ne disparaissaient pas. (Mirbeau 1989, 60; 2015, 67)

The flies’ base animal needs obliterate conventional sculptures. As a result, one could argue that the flies actually create a new “work of art” that stains a false symbol of bourgeois ideology and devastates a family in the process. With such dramatic imagery, Mirbeau presents animals as sources of both destruction and creation. *In the Sky* challenges the assumption that animals cannot create anything of aesthetic merit. As noted in the previous

chapter, the public as well as scientists and scholars were beginning to see animals in a new light as Darwin's findings were becoming more and more widely accepted. McHugh argues that at the turn of the century the literary marketplace was permeated with fiction about animals (2011, 213). Expanding on Gillian Beer's argument that by the *fin de siècle* "everyone found themselves living in a Darwinian world," Barbara Jean Larson highlights the recent scholarly interest in the connections between Darwin and turn-of-the-century artists such as van Gogh, Odilon Redon and Gustav Klimt (Larson 2009, 4).

The profound influence of Darwin's ideas in the Belle Époque corresponded with transforming views about man's place in the environment. Mirbeau's works, specifically, illustrate the value of nonhuman species and reject the assumption of anthropological superiority. For example, in *Dingo* (1913), the narrator's dog teaches him to live according to his instincts, even though they are murderous:

I was wrong to have wanted to inculcate in Dingo human notions, habits of human life, as if there were only men in the universe and that the same sensitivity that animated plants, insects, birds, all animals and ourselves indifferently. Fortunately, Dingo, being more intelligent than myself, resisted. He knew very well what was needed to nourish his body and spirit, what we have in common with animals, and what separates them from us eternally./

J'avais tort de vouloir inculquer à Dingo des notions humaines, des habitudes de vie humaine, comme s'il n'y eût que des hommes dans l'univers et qu'une même sensibilité animât indifféremment les plantes, les insectes, les oiseaux, tous les animaux et nous-mêmes. Heureusement, Dingo, étant plus intelligent que moi, résistait. Il savait très bien ce qui convenait à la nourriture de son corps et de son esprit, ce que nous avons de commun avec les bêtes, et ce qui nous en sépare éternellement. (Mirbeau 1913, 9)

For the narrator, Dingo is more intelligent than himself because he follows his survival instincts, which help him survive. Mirbeau suggests that human beings are undoubtedly endowed with this sensibility found in all other eukaryotic creatures, which they ultimately deny. The narrator thus regrets imposing a human point of view onto the dog, which denies its native intelligence. This belief that we are a part of, yet separate from, the rest of the animal kingdom is a key aspect of nineteenth-century thought. In *In the Sky*, the creative artist or writer bridges this conceptual gap.

This disjointed “anti-littéraire” tale begins with an unnamed narrator who visits his friend who has degenerated into a desperate physical and mental state. “X could have made a name in literature for himself. He was incredibly gifted. But he was too sensitive. Life was killing him./X... aurait pu se créer un nom dans la littérature. Il était doué supérieurement. Mais il avait trop de sensibilité. La vie le tuait” (Mirbeau 1989, 23; 2015, 15). The structure of these sentences found on the first page announces the character’s trajectory of a downward slope—he has tremendous potential and “could have” been a success. His extreme sensitivity gives him “superior” talent yet also crushes him. In the novel, this sensitivity is linked to animals, often arthropods and sometimes mammals. He lives on top of a peak in a seemingly haunted former abbey, covered in insects, larvae and spider webs (Mirbeau 1989, 31). Having lost contact with the human world, X himself has all but devolved into vermin.

Surrounded by wild creatures in the isolated woods, the first narrator too fears he may lose his reasoning faculties and that his very life may be threatened: “Fear gripped me. I thought I heard sinister cries, the clamouring of a crowd, beasts caterwauling, demons laughing, the death rattles of slaughtered animals, all penetrating my sinister foxhole through the window-joints and the cracks in the doors/J'eus peur. On eût dit que des cris sinistres, des clameurs de foule, des miaulements de fauves, des rires de démons, des râles de bêtes tuées, pénétraient, en ce louche réduit, par les joints des fenêtres, les fissures des portes” (Mirbeau 1989, 32; 2015, 27). The beastly cries are able to penetrate through the cracks and fissures of the windows and doors that remain unsealed by humans. X, as a writer lodged in this decrepit house, is able to access a sort of portal into a sphere of existence that most of humanity has sealed off. “Cries,” “clamouring,” “caterwauling” and “death rattles of slaughtered animals” are all vocal expressions that are unconcerned with human language. Thus, the creative realm that has been untouched by human consciousness is rendered inexpressible by language.

In this section of the novel, the narrator describes an experience during which he feels vertigo and hears strange buzzing noises in his ears. “My ears were filled with strange sounds, like distant bells ringing or wasps buzzing, a trumpet choir surrounding me with its obscure melody/Mes oreilles étaient pleines de sonorités étranges; il y avait en elles comme des tintements de cloches lointaines, des bourdonnements de guêpes. Et des fanfares m'obsédaient de leurs airs inconnus” (Mirbeau 1989, 31; 2015, 27). As Deleuze and Guattari write in their analysis of Kafka’s

works, sound in minoritarian literature is an unformed manner of expression (1975a, 6). The above-mentioned passage from *In the Sky* reveals the unformed modes of expression that illustrate the potential of creativity. Interestingly, unlike the rest of the novel, which contains ellipses that provide a blank space in between words, this passage does not have ellipses. The passage is completely infused with animal-like images and sounds.

The first narrator worries about X: “What will become of him? One fine morning they’ll find him eaten by the spiders and the rats! / *Que va-t-il devenir?... On le trouvera, un beau matin, mangé par les araignées et les rats!*” (Mirbeau 1989, 33; 2015, 29). The animals threaten to engulf and devour him—eating away the last traces of his humanity. Predating Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “becoming-animal” as a creative line of flight, the word “becoming” (*devenir*) frequently reappears in Mirbeau’s novella. When Georges cries to the heavens after the death of his parents, he repeatedly asks himself what he will become (Mirbeau 1989, 80). The repetition of this word reinforces the characters’ uncertain futures as well as their impermanent status as shifting matter. “I see only infinities in every direction, which swallow me like an atom, like a shadow that lasts only an instant and can never return / *Je ne vois que des infinités de toutes parties, qui m’engloutissent comme un atome, et comme une ombre qui ne dure qu’un instant sans retour*” (Mirbeau 1989, 48; 2015, 50). Just as living beings disappear into dust, which will nourish another life, in the novel, one narrator dissolves into the next. “X” later asks the narrator to read his life story, whose protagonist “Georges” then becomes the second narrator of Mirbeau’s novella.

On the one hand, X’s potential death from rats and spiders portrays animals as frightening and violent others. On the other, the scene may evoke Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of the film *Souvenirs d’un spectateur* (1972) in which a pack of rats devour the hero at the end of the film (1980, 285). For the theorists, packs of animals reinforce multiplicity, which can be destructive to any unilateral way of thinking or being. Animals can, thus, eat away the essential components of bourgeois human life: family, professional and romantic relationships. In the second story, Georges’ affinity with other species keeps him from having a meaningful relationship with his father who cannot stand his silence, which the father refers to as being dog-like, asking him questions one would ask the family pet (Mirbeau 1989, 36). A child prodigy who could barely speak, his sisters and father believe him to be an imbecile. Georges is also unable to maintain a relationship with his love interest Julia, and he is a failure professionally. While the lack

of achievement in these areas could be conceived of as failures, this is only so in terms of a bourgeois value system. Thus, it may not be possible or even desirable for the avant-gardist to ever fully accomplish traditional goals, for he aligns himself more with animals than with humans.

In terms of contemporary animal studies, it may be useful to look at the dogs, spiders and insects that populate *In the Sky* as minor forces that undermine “molar” or majoritarian social formations, to use a term coined by Deleuze and Guattari. According to Michel and Nivet, Mirbeau revolted against numerous instruments of societal repression in the Third Republic, including “‘The pirates of the stockmarket’ and the ‘sharks of commerce and industry’, and unruly ‘warmongers’” (Michel and Nivet 1989, 4). His 1900 novel *Diary of a Chambermaid* gives voice to a domestic servant and exposes the perversity and hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie family structure, which is based on exploitation. Contemporary readers may draw parallels between Mirbeau’s work and Deleuze and Guattari affirmation of Kafka’s writings as a revolt against Freudian psychology, which most often points to the family system as the origin of neuroses. In contrast, the theorists argue that the Oedipal structure in the family is simply a small-scale version of repressive social systems, technocratic, bureaucratic and fascist machines, which seek to squelch individual freedom (Deleuze and Guattari 1975b, 22).

In minor literature, which is inherently political, animals can serve as “lines of flight” from such systems. Linking animality and writing, the writer in *In the Sky* presents the vision that all creatures possess a life force, which Lamarck called “*la vie*,” resulting from the stimulation and movement of organs and vital fluids to create positive activity (Lamarck 1809, 406).

I vaguely understood that man is made to act, to create, that he possesses a brain in order to dream up ways of life and muscular energy in order to realize and disseminate them [...] I sensed that all beings, under the threat of decline and death, must obey the supreme law, the law that creates so much movement: work./

Je comprenais, obscurément, que l’homme est fait pour agir, pour créer, qu’il possède un cerveau pour concevoir des formes de vie, des énergies musculaires pour les réaliser et les transmettre [...] je sentais que tous les êtres, sous peine de déchéance et de mort, doivent obéir à cette loi suprême, à cette loi génératrice du mouvement: le travail. (Mirbeau 1989, 82; 2015, 94)

Mirbeau places human creativity and drive to work as part of the survival mechanism that exists within all creatures.

This creative life force is directly opposed to parental authority, which is oppressive and causes the narrator to feel listless and unmotivated. “But parental authority, as it stuffed me with lies, had killed the kernel of individual conscience that once lived in me/*L'autorité parentale, en me gorgeant de mensonges, avait détruit le peu de conscience individuelle qui était en moi jadis*” (Mirbeau 1989, 81; 2015, 94). The protagonist’s father is merely a delegate of the oppressive societal mechanism, which seeks to “kill the individual/*tuer l’individu*” (Mirbeau 1989, 82; 2015, 95). Georges’ own body and spirit are thus a battleground between the natural order, whose generative life force produces intuition and talent, and social order, which seeks to destroy individual freedom (Mirbeau 1989, 82). Conversely, in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin articulates the individuality of each member of a species, consisting of countless variations in physical appearance and mental faculties. “It is manifest that man is now subject to much variability. No two individuals of the same race are quite alike. We may compare millions of faces, and each will be distinct” (Darwin 1871, 109). *In the Sky*’s incorporation of Darwinian and Lamarckian evolution is a revolt against patriarchal conformity and a celebration of individual life.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the solution to social repression is neither to become subservient nor slay the father and become the new “king,” for both options would cause a person to be even more inscribed in the Oedipal system. As this myth of repression supposedly defines the human social order, the solution is to “become animal”: “become a beetle, become a dog, become a monkey, make your head spin, rather than lower your head and remain a bureaucrat, inspector, judge and judged/*devenir coléoptère, devenir chien, devenir singe, filer la tête la première en culbutant*” *plutôt que de baisser la tête et rester bureaucrate, inspecteur, juge et jugé*” (Deleuze and Guattari 1975b, 23). Similarly, Georges claims, “I had an instinctive, invincible disgust for the judiciary, functionary, and administrative vocations, which seemed odious and dishonorable to me/*J’avais un instinctif, un invincible dégoût pour les professions judiciaires, gabellaires, administratives, qui me semblaient odieuses et déshonorantes*” (Mirbeau 1989, 80). The writer’s instinct makes him disgusted by legal and corporate positions, which are, in his mind, based on degradation and debasement. Rather than focusing on achievement or status as typically defined by human society, George’s interest in literature and art is described in terms of nonhuman creativity.

In *In the Sky*, the writer protagonist's lack of success in life allows him to escape literary norms, creating divergent plots and an aesthetic of nihilism. I have placed the negative expressions in the following quotations in bold:

I've lived in quiet poverty, **without** a single novelistic event; all my acts have been **incoherent**, always alone [...] So I expect this work to bring me **neither** glory, **nor** money, **nor** even the consolation of imagining I might tug on some old lady's heartstrings. [...] And indeed why would anyone on Earth preoccupy themselves with such a silent insect? I have, voluntarily or by accident—I **don't** know which—broken off all the ties with human solidarity./

Ayant vécu de peu, sans bruit, sans nul événement romanesque, n'y ayant commis que des actes incobérents, toujours solitaire [...] Je n'attends donc, de ce travail, nulle gloire, nul argent, ni la consolation de songer que je puis émouvoir l'âme d'une dame vieille et riche [...] Et pourquoi, quelqu'un sur la terre, se préoccuperaît-il du silencieux insecte que je suis? J'ai volontairement ou par surprise, je ne sais, rompu tous les liens qui m'attachaient à la solidarité humaine. (Mirbeau 1989, 59; 2015, 55)

Lacking aspirations for wealth or glory as well as the life experience and companionship that would inspire a successful novel, Georges finds himself severed from the rest of humanity. Like a termite that chews the dead wood of a house and demolishes its very foundation from the inside, Mirbeau's nihilistic prose obliterates traditional human values—leaving behind only a silent, solitary insect.

5.1 THE FLY-POET AND THE SPIDER-ARTIST: WRITING AND PAINTING AS ANIMALISTIC PROCESSES

The focus on invertebrates as well as the processes of evolution, decay and transmutation found in Mirbeau's novels and notebooks reveal that the author read both Lamarck and Darwin. He affirms “a Darwinian evolution that insensitively leads monkey to man, man to actor, actor to statesman by a slow degeneration/*une évolution darwinienne qui mène insensiblement le singe à l'homme, l'homme au comédien, le comédien à l'homme d'État par une lente dégénérescence*” (Mirbeau 1995, 35). In this perhaps facetious sentence, the novelist uses evolutionary science to explain and deconstruct the order of the society of his day. He adds, “I dare to say that since Lamarck, nobody

has written anything more probing concerning the gradual transformation of beings/*J'ose dire que depuis Lamarck, on n'a rien écrit de plus probant sur les transformations graduelles des êtres*" (Mirbeau 1995, 35). However, referring to the scientist's negative criticism which attempted to render him spineless, Mirbeau jokes, "The author of *Zoological Philosophy* and the chapter on election, who bowed down to editors and became flat before committees, would have been a beautiful example of an animal in *The Natural History of Invertebrates/L'auteur de la philosophie zoologique et le chapitre de l'élection avec les courbettes aux relecteurs et les aplatissements devant les comités seraient une belle page de l'Histoire naturelle des animaux sans vertèbres*" (Mirbeau 1995, 35–36). As a professor of the insects and worms division of the Muséum National de l'Histoire Naturelle, Lamarck (1744–1829) was the first to categorize spiders, crustaceans, mollusks and insects in separate classifications (Lamarck 1809, 1). The scientist revolts against the conventional belief that to understand the organization of man one should only study mammals. Lamarck argues that an examination of the smallest animals reveals an "order of things/*ordre des choses*" that negates the differences between mammals and other classes of animals (1809, 13). Lamarck's fascination with the diversity of these creatures led him to believe that environmental changes would cause changes in physical or behavior traits in order for an organism to adapt. Lamarck also believed that the simplest creatures occurred from "spontaneous generation" and progressively become more complex over time. With the exception of recent theories on epigenetics, where certain modifications in DNA may be inherited by future generations, Lamarck's beliefs have been largely discredited. However, Mirbeau underscores the revolutionary nature of Lamarck's works compared to other scientific theories of the time.

Both Darwin and Lamarck emphasize the creative and destructive forces of nature, a dualism that undergirds Mirbeau's novel. Lamarck writes, "Indeed, in its organization, animated by life's force, we notice a real power that transforms, repairs, destroys and produces objects that never would have existed without it/*En effet dans l'organisation, animée par la vie, nous remarquons une véritable puissance qui change, qui répare, qui détruit et qui produit des objets qui n'eussent jamais existé sans elle*" (1809, 31). Darwin also argues that both creation and destruction are integral to all life. "Every being, which during its natural lifetime produces several eggs or seeds, must suffer destruction during some period of its life" (2010, 147). This last quotation by Darwin relates to *In the Sky* because although the artist creates, he also suffers—as well as causes—destruction during some periods of his life.

As arthropods that might inspire horror or disgust in the common person, spiders and flies are the quintessential figures of Decadence. Mirbeau's interest in these two animals parallels that of Lamarck, who writes of araneids: "They are almost all land-based, run with agility, have a repugnant physiognomy and are more or less venomous/*Elles sont presque toutes terrestres, courent, la plupart avec agilité, ont une physionomie repoussante, et sont plus ou moins venimeuses*" (1815, 121–122). In this section, we will examine the link between these invertebrates and the arts. In his analysis of animals and contemporary art, Aloi has illustrated the important implications for representations of nonmammalian species: "animals that do not lend themselves to anthropomorphic relational modes are excluded, at least for many, becoming invisible and merging with the leafy backdrop. At times, when these creatures are encountered, a sense of disgust, indifference and apathy prevails, so that no relational mode different from that of pure objectification becomes possible" (2011, 111). In contrast, art that incorporates invertebrates helps challenge our relationship with such animals, suggesting that "they should not be looked at as inferior or worthless, but only as different? And might this avoidance of simplification also bring children to develop into more tolerant and understanding beings towards other humans too?" (Aloi 2011, 111). In what way could the connection between arthropods and the arts in Mirbeau's novel support Aloi's theory that refusing to see some creatures as "inferior or worthless," increases tolerance and understanding of all beings? On the one hand, Mirbeau's Decadent novel reinforces and affirms attitudes of disgust and horror toward invertebrates, rather than inciting tolerance. On the other, by including animals that escape human-centered modes of thinking, *In the Sky* suggests an openness to other modes of perception, which may facilitate understanding across species.

In the text, the spider could be seen as a correlate to the painter, and the fly, the poet or nature writer. Lucien shares many parallels with the spider—they are venomous predators that capture life in their "*toile*," whether canvas or web. They are also violent and ominous creatures of the night. The writer's "only companion/*seul compagnon*" before Lucien was, in fact, a spider (Mirbeau 1989, 67), who prefigures his friendship and apprenticeship with the painter. Georges believes that he hears the spider telling him:

You're sad, you despair, and you cry! It's your own fault. Why did you want to become a fly? You could have easily been like me, a joyful spider...Don't you see, in life, you have to eat or be eaten? Myself, I prefer to eat [...] The flies

like the sun, they like the light, they like flowers, they are all poets. They come and tangle their wings in the webs strung round those flowers in the sun...and you take them, and you eat them./

Tu es triste, tu te désoles, et tu pleures!... C'est ta faute...Pourquoi as-tu voulu être mouche, quand il t'était si facile, d'être comme moi, une joyeuse araignée... Vois-tu, dans la vie, il faut manger ou être mangé...Moi, j'aime mieux manger [...]. Les mouches aiment le soleil, elles aiment la lumière, les fleurs, ce sont des poètes... Elles viennent s'embarrasser les ailes, dans les fils tendus près de la fleur, dans le soleil... Et tu les prends, et tu les manges. (Mirbeau 1989, 67; 2015, 73–74)

The relationship between Georges and Lucien is both symbiotic and parasitic, emblematising the interconnectivity between literature and the arts. On one hand, Lucien, like a joyous spider which takes pleasure in killing (Mirbeau 1989, 67), finally inspires great happiness in the demoralized and desolate Georges. He begs Lucien, who insists that he will never find a painting or book as valuable as life. Georges demands: “Tell me. Advise me. Teach me. I’m still just being born ... I’m so small, weaker than a child/*Dis-moi...Conseille-moi...Apprends-moi...Je ne fais que naître...je suis tout petit*” (Mirbeau 1989, 86). Lamarck notes: “Araneids are all carnivorous, sucking insects with their mouth with the help of their jaws and seizing them by the hooks in their mandibles/*Les Aranéides sont toutes très carnassières, sucent avec leur bouche et à l'aide de leurs mâchoires, les insectes qu'elles peuvent saisir, les retiennent et les tuent avec les crochets de leurs mandibules*” (1815, 21–22). While Lucien encourages and stimulates Georges, he also engulfs him like a spider would a fly: “He absorbed me to the point where nothing outside of him existed anymore for me/*Il m'absorbait tellement que rien, au-dehors de lui, n'exista plus pour moi*” (Mirbeau 1989, 96; 2015, 114). Perhaps like the genre of literary impressionism in general, which attempts to capture the artistic climate and processes of its day, the writer becomes completely consumed by the artist.

In the story, the artist-spider traps the fly-poet, who lauds sun, light and flowers and devours it (Fig. 5.2). Possibly inspired by Mary Howitt’s 1888 poem “The Spider and the Fly,” in which a spider entraps a fly into her web through flattery, Mirbeau warns against romantic elegy. “Thinking only of her brilliant eyes, and green and purple hue;/Thinking only of her crested head—*poor foolish thing!* At last,/Up jumped the cunning spider, and fiercely held her fast./He dragged her up his winding stair, into his dismal den,/Within his little parlor; but she ne’er came out again!” (Howitt 1922, 19).



Fig. 5.2 Odilon Redon. *L'Araignée qui pleure*, 1881. Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain

Similarly, rather than trite exaltation of nature, Mirbeau advocates violence, justified by the destruction found in the natural world. Just as a spider devours its unsuspecting prey, the avant-gardist destroys fallacious ideologies and their shallow representations.

Georges notes: “As I watch the still little spider, and it sees that she’s watching me as well, her eight eyes fixed ironically upon me/*Je regarde la petite araignée, immobile, et il me semble qu’elle aussi me regarde avec ses huit yeux, ironiquement fixés sur moi*” (Mirbeau 1989, 67; 2015, 73). In this quotation, like in Laforgue’s poem “At the Berlin Aquarium,” not

only does the narrator stare at a creature, the creature also stares back at him. The act of staring back reflects some agency and power. Despite their obvious differences (the spider has eight eyes, while the narrator does not), there is some communication between the two beings. In this section, Mirbeau subverts arrogance regarding the abilities of animals—namely that they cannot speak and cannot produce art. From Descartes onward, it is believed that animals do not speak, they are machines that merely “parrot” but do not think—“they could never use words or other signs like we do to declare our thoughts to others/*jamaïs elles ne pourraient user de paroles, ni d’autres signes en les composant, comme nous faisons pour déclarer aux autres nos pensées*” (Descartes 2006, 92).

Furthermore, art is considered a fundamental demarcation between humans and nonhuman species because it is a conscious, rationally minded and learned talent. By including a talking spider as a spokesperson for his aesthetic, Mirbeau erodes such prejudices. In *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, & Human Evolution*, Denis Dutton writes that Darwinian evolution undermines the idea that the beauty of a spider’s web is just an example of a “pretty accident” in nature and is by no means art (2010, 1). Throughout the nineteenth century, spiders’ baffling, spiraling webs inspired a number of scientific experiments to test the sensory powers of arachnids. Dr. and Mrs. Peckham concluded in 1887, after placing perfumed rods and tuning forks next to spiders, that the animals could both hear and smell (Porter 1906, 311–312). By painting female spiders various colors and testing males’ responses and by watching females try to locate their nests on pink, blue or red paper, the researchers concluded that spiders can distinguish colors. They, in fact, prefer red (Porter 1906, 311–312). Poetry of the early twentieth century has explicitly linked spiders with the imagination. Emily Dickinson’s “The Spider as an Artist” (circa 1873) privileges instinct over societal recognition, portraying the arachnid as a “Neglected son of Genius” which has “never been employed” (Whitman 1982). In Whitman’s “A Noiseless Patient Spider” (1891), the invertebrate is directly connected to the poet, who, like the spider that launches its thread, casts his musings until they take form:

A noiseless patient spider,
 I mark’d where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
 Mark’d how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
 It launch’d forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself [...]]
 And you O my soul where you stand,
 Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,

Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them [...]
 Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul. (Whitman, 352)

Like *In the Sky*, the poem also emphasizes blank space as the origin of creation—“vacant vast surrounding” and “measureless oceans of space.” The area between the spider’s silk threads is equally important to its *oeuvre*, just as is the painter’s canvas or the cloudless sky.

As unproductivity is an essential part of productivity, the spider in *In the Sky* is primarily in a state of rest: “And she hangs there idle, does not spin any webs in ambush/*Elle demeure inactive, ne tisse aucune toile, ne se livre à aucune embuscade*” (Mirbeau 1989, 66; 2015, 73). This lack of activity could allude to that of the two protagonists, who feel as if they accomplish nothing. Lucien himself states that he is creatively impotent and a failure (Mirbeau 1989, 129). However, as Georges constantly moves the lamp where the spider rests, “So, nimble like a gymnast, the spider climbs back up the invisible thread, crosses the ceiling, and drops back down a new thread until she’s set herself up again in the heat of the lamp/*L’araignée remonte le long du fil invisible, comme un gymnaste, suit le plafond et redescend sur un nouvel fil, jusqu’à ce qu’elle ait retrouvé sa place, à la chaleur de la lampe*” (Mirbeau 1989, 66; 2015, 72). Then, the spider returns to sleeping. It moves again when the narrator moves the lamp. It does not create or spin a web until an instinctual need arises. Thus, the spider fluctuates between immobility and activity as well as creation and destruction. Instinct drives the spider to act, and it does not concern itself about moments of inactivity:

So what if I had been a human spider, so what if I had savored the joy of murder? Would I have been happy, or happier? Would I have not been crushed anyway by the mystery of that sky, by all that’s unknown, by all of this infinity that weighs on me?/

J’aurais été l’araignée humaine, quand même j’aurais joui de la joie des meurtres!... Est-ce que j’aurais été heureux, plus heureux? Est-ce que je n’aurais pas été toujours écrasé par le mystère de ce ciel, par tout cet inconnu, par tout cet infini qui pèse sur moi? (Mirbeau 1989, 67; 2015, 74)

One difference between the artist or the writer and a nonhuman species is that while a human might fear the unknown and may feel frustrated trying to express the ineffable quality of nature, another species may not have this

concern or frustration. In this sense, invertebrates become the ultimate model for the minor writer or artist.

The assertion that one must eat or be eaten evidently alludes to the Darwinian concept that every species must “struggle for life” by competing with other species. “Hence, as more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must be in every case a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or the same conditions of life” (Darwin 2010, 146). According to Darwin, despite one’s seemingly innocuous appearance or pleasant music, every creature must prey upon another for its survival (Darwin 2010, 146). For Mirbeau, the artist is no exception. The dynamic between Georges and Lucien is consumed with fear. Georges comments on Lucien, “His gaze frightened me in those moments; he stared just like the hallucinatory faces on his canvases/*Son regard m’effrayait en ces moments, son regard était pareil aux regards hallucinants des figures de ces toiles*” (Mirbeau 1989, 89; 2015, 105). Lucien captures terrifying faces in his paintings just as a spider captures flies in its web. Lucien’s gaze is as dark, wild and frightening as the works of art he produces.

5.2 DARWIN AND DECADENCE: THE SPLENDOR OF DECAY AND HORROR

With Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Huysmans’ *A Rebours* as its urtexts, Decadent fiction by writers such as Khan, Oscar Wilde, Rachilde and the Comte de Lautréamont delights in perversity, baseness and the unbridled freedom of the imagination. Decadence often employs putrid, vile and degenerative imagery to shock bourgeois sensibilities and to challenge the notion of nature as a stagnant and unassailable paradigm. As discussed in the previous chapter on Laforgue, Decadence employs Darwin’s *The Descent of Man*—along with Lombroso’s theories of anthropological criminology—to formulate biological theories of descent to explain the so-called cultural deterioration of the *fin de siècle*. The artists of the Decadence, however, embraced their perceived status as being “degenerate.”

In *Degeneration*, published the same year as the first installment of *In the Sky*, Nordau claims that the authors and artists of his time period possess “the same mental and physical characteristics as those who satisfy their unhealthy impulses with the knife of the assassin or the bomb of the dynamiter instead of the pen and pencil” (1968, vii). Lucien, as “an artist

or a murderer/*un artiste ou un assassin*,” is the kind of subversive rebel that Nordau would categorize as mentally and physiologically degenerate—on par with the most dangerous criminals (Mirbeau 1989, 96; 2015, 82). For Gautier, an early Decadent writer, expressing this violence through literature is acknowledging the darker aspects of life, in its horrors, monstrosities and paradoxes. He writes:

In opposition to the classic style, it admits of shading, and these shadows teem and swarm with the larvae of superstitions, the haggard phantoms of insomnia, nocturnal terrors, remorse which starts and turns back at the slightest noise, monstrous dreams stayed only by impotence, obscure phantasies at which the daylight would stand amazed. (in Nordau 1968, 299)

This larval imagery, found explicitly in Mirbeau’s novel, points to not only that which is unpleasant and ignored—crawling in the dark shadows of the unconscious mind—but also what gives birth to the imagination. As Francisco de Goya said, “The imagination, abandoned by reason, brings forth impossible monsters: united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the source of her wonders” (in Gamwell et al. 2000, 78). The painter suggests that true art stems from a “monstrous” side of man that arises when reason is shut down. In his *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1799), an artist or writer falls asleep at his desk on top of papers and pens. In the darkness of night, owls, cats, bats and other nocturnal creatures surround him, appearing as if they are emerging from his body. These frightening animals are sketchy and nebulous in the distance, but they appear more and more clearly the closer they are to the artist. Like Goya’s work, *In the Sky* indicates that the artist is a vehicle for expressing the irrational side of life once reason “sleeps.”

As Miller correctly notes, at times Decadence’s association between animals and irrational forces may have less to do with the behavior of actual species or individuals themselves (2017, 196). Essentializing animals as demonic or horrific may justify violence toward animals. However, Decadent literature aimed to unmask the violence in man, advocating an “embrace of unbridled libido, the abnormal and the gruesome, of monstrous products of the imagination, of lust and violence, of the shady sides of existence” (Wolf 2009, 10). The affirmation of lust, violence and the grotesque in Mirbeau’s novel is a celebration of the illogical side of humans, freed from reason, conventions and the clear rules of academic knowledge. At other times, Mirbeau affirms unique characteristics of

particular species—such as bats being nocturnal—as particularly decadent traits. Georges is a dark creature of the night.

When night fell, I would tear myself from my shadowy hole like a bat and prowl the quays, the bridges, anywhere Lucien and I had spent hours together in dreary reverie./

La nuit venue, comme une chauve-souris, je m'arrachais à mon trou d'ombre, et j'allais le long de quais, sur les ponts, partout où Lucien et moi avions passé des heures de morne réverie. (Mirbeau 1989, 100; 2015, 121)

In this passage, the writer is like a bat that leaves the isolation of its home at night to frequent the dark, peripheral and extraordinary spaces of the city.

For the Decadents, predatory rage tears apart obsolete ideas, whose makers shudder in primal fear. In *The Expression of Emotions in Humans and Animals*, Darwin illustrated that emotions are expressed in similar manners in multiple species. Darwin concluded from his observations of behavioral and physiological phenomena that he was able to understand the inner conflicts occurring in both humans and animals (Navarette 2015, 5). Humans and most animals experience fear and terror in similar ways. For example, “The heart beats quickly and violently, so that it palpitates or knocks against the ribs [...] The hairs also on the skin stand erect; and the superficial muscles shiver. In connection with the disturbed action of the heart, the breathing is hurried” (Darwin 1872, 290).

In addition, a similar theme found in both Darwin and Decadence is that even a seemingly calm and pleasant person might be masking horror. As Darwin writes in his notebooks, “It is difficult to believe in the dreadful but quiet war of organic beings going on [in] the peaceful woods [and] smiling fields” (in Navarette 2015, 31). Thus, Darwin concluded that all species are motivated by survival and competition with other species despite outward appearances. Decadent literature reveals the horrors that may be operating in every human being and thus creates an aesthetic of revulsion and fright.

In *In the Sky*, the focus on horror stirs the imagination. For example, the original narrator describes his time spent in a frightening house.

Its dirty bare walls were streaked with runny yellow saltpeter, hideously crawling with black insects and larvae; countless spiderwebs hung from the corners and swayed from the beams. I expected to suddenly see owls and

bats gliding over my head. I felt oppressed by the vague dread one feels in haunted houses by the unspeakable menace of a place of murder./

Des rampants hideux d'insectes noirs et de larves, d'innombrables toiles d'araignées pendaient aux angles, se balançait aux poutres. N'allais-je pas voir planer, tout à coup, au-dessus de ma tête, le vol des hiboux et des chauves-souris? Je sentais véritablement peser sur moi la vague horreur des maisons hantées, l'indécible effroi des auberges assassines. (Mirbeau 1989, 32; 2015, 27)

This quotation focuses on both the seen and the unseen. There are frightening traces of animals, such as the spider webs and insect larvae scattered throughout the house. The horror and disgust of these creatures stir the narrator's imagination. He then goes on to imagine haunted houses and assassins. His deep-seated fear and desire for self-protection cause him to envision a myriad of possibilities and outcomes.

This fear of wildlife in the novel may represent a catalyst for creative thoughts and images. As Darwin writes in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*:

The word 'fear' seems to be derived from what is sudden and dangerous; and that of terror from the trembling of the vocal organs and body. I use the word 'terror' for extreme fear; but some writers think it ought to be confined to cases in which the imagination is more particularly concerned. (1872, 290)

Darwin presents the physiological signs of fear and terror in both humans and animals, and he also presents the link between terror and creativity. After all, Lucien asks the question as to whether art is truly the "torture" and "hell" he experiences, the fear that one's very survival might be threatened (Mirbeau 1989, 90). The painter's own terrifying, ghastly and unique vision illustrates the absence of a singular and objective reality. For this reason, Mirbeau revolted against naturalism, arguing that writing can never adequately express the subjective and transformative chaos of external phenomena (Y. L. 2015, np).

At the end of the novel, Lucien degenerates while staying on a mountain peak of Porte-Joie. "I'll have to get settled first, find a room for myself between these ruined walls—hunt the rats and the owls who, for centuries, have been leading mysterious lives [...] It seems to me that I'm about to become a new man/*Il va falloir m'installer, me trouver une chambre, entre ces murs en ruine, en chasser les rats et les hiboux, qui, depuis des siècles,*

mènent la leur mystérieuse vie [...] Je vais être un autre homme” (Mirbeau 1989, 118). This “new man” is a rapacious half-human, half-animal. As this passage indicates, Lucien dwells in isolation and becomes almost a “caveman” not able to relate to the rest of modern humanity. In 1868, remains and artifacts of a Cro-Magnon man had been discovered in the Dordogne region of France, the same region as the famous Lascaux Cave paintings, which were later discovered in 1940 (Chassain 2013, 13).

The discovery of the Cro-Magnon offered alternative possibilities of behaving that did not exist in civilized society. “His long hair and wild beard gave his face an even more ruined look. His eyes burned with a feverish luster/*Ses cheveux longs, sa barbe inculte, rendait encore l'aspect de son visage plus délabré. Et dans ses yeux brillait une lueur de fièvre*” (Mirbeau 2015, 115; 1989, 123). This is not so much the process of transforming into a specific species of animal but rather losing the qualities that we often assign to man. With his demonic eyes, reminiscent of Frenhofer in *le Chef d'Oeuvre Inconnu* or Claude in *L'Oeuvre*, the painter loses all connection with civilization, as indicated by the adjectives “wild” and “ruined.” After many laborious attempts at painting, Lucien also “exhausted himself with talk, theories and wild gestures/*s'épuisait en paroles, en théories, en gestes désordonnés*” (Mirbeau 1989, 128; 2015, 161). The artist has actually surpassed the limitations of language and theories to the point of exhaustion.

An eccentric genius, Lucien also attempts to break free forced rules of perspective and color (which Mirbeau labels harmony of “evil”) and express his uncommon natural gifts (Mirbeau 1989, 82). Lucien continues the nineteenth-century depiction of unrecognized artists as savages, madmen and murderers. Mirbeau writes:

you would see him in the fields, on the riverbank, stabbing his easel in every kind of weather and slapping strange colors all over the canvas [...] an artist and a murderer are pretty much the same thing for the peaceful inhabitants of the countryside./

on le voyait dans les champs, au bord de la rivière, piquer, n'importe le temps, son chevalet, et barbouiller des toiles des couleurs étranges. Un artiste, ou un assassin, c'est à peu près la même chose, pour les habitants paisibles des campagnes. (Mirbeau 1989, 83; 2015, 96)

In this passage, Mirbeau pays homage to previous literary renderings of marginal artists, particularly in his use of the word “barbouiller,” which means “to paint awkwardly” (Imbs 1971). Lucien’s naïve scrawls can be

traced back to his upbringing in the countryside, where he never learned the art of classical painting.

In Balzac's seminal novella *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu* (1831), the mad genius Frenhofer unlearns traditional means of representation and creates a painting that is incomprehensible to his contemporaries. He dismisses his depiction of the female form as merely "a work that I scrawled to establish the model's pose; this painting is worthless/*une toile que j'ai barbouillée pour établir la pose, ce tableau ne vaut rien*" (Balzac 1993, 52). However, Frenhofer considers a work containing a foot surrounded by "only colors confusingly lumped together and containing a multitude of bizarre lines/*que des couleurs confusément amassées et contenues par une multitude de lignes bizarres*" as his greatest masterpiece (Balzac 1993, 55). Balzac's early novella, which would later inspire Pablo Picasso to illustrate its pages, prefigures the paradoxical modern opinion that true genius is naïve, crude and defies all current logical frameworks and can thus most often be understood by future generations. This notion is at the heart of Mirbeau's decadent fiction.

In spite of nineteenth-century narratives of the "degenerate" artist, the concept of Decadence does not only mean decline—writers such as Baudelaire and Gautier were "vociferous advocates of the redemptive and transmutative power of art, they were instrumental in effecting, for the first time, a positive apprehension of the concept of decadence and its attendant connotations" (Flint 1980). This notion of transmutation on one level indicates the depiction of change within a work of art (such as images of wilting flowers or falling leaves). For example, Lucien has a dream that he tries to plant a lily:

the lily bulb, powerful and beautiful like a phallus wilts in my hand; its scales
peel away, rotten and sticky, and when I try at last to push it into the soil,
the bulb has disappeared. All my dreams bear the same stamp of abortion,
rot and death! /

À mesure que j'approche de la terre le bulbe puissant et beau comme un sexe, Il se fane, dans ma main, les écailles s'en détachent, pourries et gluantes, et, lorsque je veux enfin l'enfoncer dans le sol, le bulbe a disparu; tous mes rêves ont le même caractère d'avortement, de la pourriture, de la mort! (Mirbeau 1989, 121; 2015, 134)

Rather than a plant that bears seeds, the creatively impotent Lucien holds but a wilting bulb. This image reverses the traditional image of the Artist clutching a phallic paintbrush like a sword and instead makes him subject

to the natural forces of transience and decay, illustrated by the words: “rotten,” “disappear” and “death.” This deteriorating force even drives Mirbeau’s sentence structure. While the first part of the above-cited sentence illustrates the artist’s attempt to plant the lily, which appears powerful and beautiful, the lily rots and dies in spite of the artist’s intention to plant it. This degenerative biological and literary process thus erodes the possessive investment in both masculine and human/humanist power and control. This focus on decay as an aesthetic and moral value is a defining value of Decadent literature. “This tension between the viscera implied by physical degeneration on the one hand, and transcendent human strivings on the other, is what R.K.R. Thornton calls the ‘decadent dilemma’” (Sentell 1971, 1). The use of the reflexive verbs illustrating wilting and detaching “*se faner*” and “*se détacher*” indicates that the lily is changing and deteriorating by itself, beyond the control of Lucien.

Decadent literature aestheticizes the process of degeneration and renewal found in Darwin’s writings. As Darwin writes in *The Origin of Species*, “How fleeting are the wishes and efforts of man! How short his time! And consequently how poor his products will be, compared with those accumulated by nature during whole geological periods. Can we wonder then, that nature’s productions be far ‘truer’ in character than man’s productions [...]” (2010, 168). In acknowledging the difficulty for man to realize his creative vision, the novel also acknowledges the incredible power of nature to both destroy and create simultaneously. “True” art reflects the organic process of nature that is both deterioration and rebirth, despite the individual intention of a particular artist. Similarly, Darwin writes, “But Natural Selection, as we shall hereafter see, is a power incessantly ready for action, and is as immeasurably superior to man’s feeble efforts, as the works of Nature are to those of Art” (2010, 73). Natural selection is a powerful force that drives creativity and diversity compared to the limited products of human beings.

Mirbeau writes, “Nature is so wonderful that it is impossible for anyone to depict it as one experiences it, and believe me, one experiences it in an even more beautiful manner than it is. It’s a mystery/*La nature est tellement merveilleuse qu’il est impossible à n’importe qui de rendre comme on la ressent; et croyez bien qu’on la ressent moins belle encore qu’elle n’est, c’est un mystère*” (Mirbeau 1993, 50). Similarly, as Frederick Harrison wrote in “Decadence in Modern Art,” “Direction!—there perhaps lies the root of the matter, and the source of our danger. The essential claim of ‘modernity’ is to assert the absolute independence of Art, and to defy any sort of

condition of limit whether of tradition, philosophy, morality or even good sense" (1893, 436). Harrison advocates that artists and writers should attempt to express that which comes "naturally," without hindering their creative process by imposing rational or metaphysical limitations.

Could Decadence, thus, be an example of literature that undermines human authority or exceptionalism? As the above quotation indicates, Decadence emphasizes the beauty of the processes of nature that are not products of either God or man. As Mirbeau writes in *In the Sky*, "I just want to see beauty around me, living beauty...earthly beauty! *Mais voir de la beauté autour de soi, de la beauté vivante...de la beauté terrestre*" (Mirbeau 1989, 29; 2015, 23). In addition, Lucien says that while traditional artistic theory might label a group of flowers "inharmonic," nature is never concerned with theory (Mirbeau 1989, 91). For Mirbeau, organic beauty, with its laws that are often antithetical to human sense of order and harmony, is a weapon against theories of art.

As an "artist-nature," Lucien does not stand apart from nature and theorize like naturalists or elegize like poets. Instead, he views nature as inseparable from his own states of being:

Mark my words—in that she doesn't exist, that she's nothing but an idealized, multifarious trick of your mind—an emotion inside of your soul! 'Ooh, a tree, a tree! So what, there's a tree! What does it prove? Your naturalist painters make me laugh, they don't know what nature is. They think a tree is a tree, and always the same tree! What idiots! One little tree is thirty-six thousand different things! It's an animal sometimes, it's, it's...how should I know?'/

Écoute-moi bien qu'elle n'existe pas, qu'elle n'est qu'une combinaison idéale et multiforme de ton cerveau, une émotion intérieure de ton âme!... Un arbre... un arbre!... Eh bien, quoi, un arbre?... Qu'est-ce que ça prouve?... Les naturalistes me font rire... Ils ne savent pas ce que c'est la nature... ils croient qu'un arbre est un arbre, et le même arbre!... Quels idiots!... Un arbre petit, mais c'est trente-six mille choses... c'est une bête, quelquefois... c'est, c'est... est-ce que je sais, moi? (Mirbeau 1989, 92–93; 2015, 109)

Representative of the Decadent movement, Lucien does not view nature as an inalterable construct exterior to his own psyche. However, his work is explicitly "minor" because it resists formulas, theories and concrete categorizations. A tree is not the same tree, because it grows, ages and withers through time. The fixed term "tree," with all of its signifiers and associations, limits its potential to be an entity, or multiple entities, which

exist beyond the scope of rational thought. In Lucien's example, a tree could become an animal. Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari point out that stagnant linguistic categorizations prevent us from conceiving that one being could become another or many others (1980, 286).

For the theorists, the minor is associated with the multiple, which form a revolutionary band. For Mirbeau, like Laforgue, the possibility of multiple perspectives ("mais c'est trente-six mille choses...") is a rebellion against a unified, totalitarian vision. Similarly, John Elderfield writes that fauvism at the dawn of the twentieth century (derived from a critic's view that paintings by Henri Matisse and André Derain looked like they had been created by large cats, the subject of *The Artist as Animal's* conclusion) was in many ways a simplification of painting during a time when the medium was dominated by Symbolist theory and literary aesthetics (1976, 14). The fauvists aimed to create vibrantly colorful and emotionally sensitive progenies of the impressionist movement, "with the same directness and anti-theoretical orientation that the art of the impressionists had possessed" (Elderfield 1976, 14). These avant-garde painters' supposed affiliation with animals explained their direct, naïve vision and forms of expression.

In contrast, it is difficult for Lucien to be a revolutionary because he, like an animal, is incapable of articulating his own creative process in human terms. Georges comments that the painter's speech is full of incoherencies and contradictions (Mirbeau 1989, 93). Although Lucien claims that naturalists do not know what nature is, he too is unable to articulate his understanding of nature. Furthermore, this last question of "how should I know?" implies that in spite of all theoretical attempts on the part of art critics, literary impressionists or naturalist writers to explain nature and innovation, the avant-garde artist is unable to articulate his own process. His language is full of contradictions, incoherencies and broken utterances.

Both Lucien and the spider have a series of ellipses between words, perhaps indicating logical gaps. Because the painter uses visual cues instead of words, he is depicted in the novel as lacking human speech and human reason. Mirbeau rebelled against the chronological and orderly composition of naturalism, expressing that it did not encapsulate the chaos of life. Instead, he sought to obliterate linguistic codes by cutting up phrases and using ellipsis like "the cuts of a scalpel into the flesh of the text which undermines rules of composition/*comme autant de coups de scalpel dans la chair du texte. Ceci fait, il s'affranchit des règles de la composition*" (Y. L. 2013, np).

Lucien's speech is another example of Decadent, degenerative writing. According to Navarette, Decadent literature can be "stylistically and linguistically degenerative, as well as structurally unstable," and there is often "linguistic disruption, stylistic decomposition, hesitancy, and instability—that thereby duplicate the process by which evil bursts through the calm surfaces of daily living" (2015, 5). This kind of unstable, illogical writing is another means of reinforcing the narrative of "artist as animal." However, at the same time, Lucien's disoriented speech is a means of deconstructing and undermining reason. In the novella, the logical gaps in the artist's speech perhaps allow for multiple interpretations of paintings in the absence of a tightly constructed narrative. The trifecta of verbs "to see, to feel, to understand/*voir, sentir, comprendre*" is Lucien's only aesthetic philosophy (Mirbeau 1989, 101; 2015, 86).

In the novel, the painter's attitude toward nature is ostensibly contradictory. On the one hand, Lucien denies its very existence—"You imagine that there are trees, plains, rivers, seas...That is a mistake, my good fellow. ...All of that is in you/*Tu t'imagines qu'il y a des arbres, des plaines, des fleuves, des mers...Erreur, mon bonhomme... ultérieurement du mois...tout cela est en toi*" (Mirbeau 1989, 109; 2015, 92). At the same time, the artist finds the lack of flora and fauna in the city stifling and leaves Paris for a mountain peak in the countryside. Lucien says, "Paris is eating my brains out, eating my heart, breaking my arms...we won't be happy until there is nothing but fields, plains and forests/*Paris me mange le cerveau, me mange le cœur, me rompt les bras...On ne sera heureux que lorsqu'il n'aura plus que des champs, des plaines, des forêts*" (Mirbeau 1989, 116; 2015, 97). The novel depicts Paris as devouring and destroying the sensitivity of the avant-gardists' physical body. While in the city, the artist-animal is in exile from wilderness.

Strangely, while the novel contains a sense of longing for nature, it also negates the idea that nature actually exists outside of one's own mind. However, if the artist could experience nature inside of himself, he would not feel the need to leave the city. Perhaps, due to the ecological depletion found in major cities, citizens were forced to experience forests, plains and fields within their own imagination. As I have argued elsewhere, the dwindling of natural resources within the city of Paris contributed to the Decadent shift away from nature as a source of inspiration. Wildlife instead becomes internalized and then aestheticized.

For the purposes of this chapter, one reason why animals were minor figures was because they were missing from urban environments. In an

article titled “The Animal Kingdom,” appearing in an issue of *l'Echo de Paris* two days after the first installment of *In the Sky* (Thursday September 22, 1892), Émile Gautier indicates that since animals are disappearing their presence has become even more valuable. His article reveals that French society’s perceptions on animals were changing during the time when *In the Sky* was being published. Gautier writes that virtually all aspects of human existence, including food, clothing, shelter, medicine, technology and arts and crafts, are in some ways dependent on nature and animals. Gautier states:

you may have occasionally asked yourself what humanity owes animals...The truth is that we can barely conceive of how we can be without animals. If they did not exist. We would have to invent them./

vous êtes-vous parfois posé la question de savoir ce que l'humanité doit aux animaux [...] La vérité est qu'on a peine à concevoir comment nous pourrions nous passer des bêtes. S'il elles n'existaient pas, nous aurions à les inventer. (1892, 2)

In reformulating Voltaire’s famous quote, “If God didn’t exist, it would be necessary to invent him,” the writer indicates that animals’ necessity to man rivals that of an all-powerful deity. Furthermore, the word “invent” implies the potential for human technology to reconstruct animals. Gautier illustrates the irony of the belief that animal life is separate from art and science when these disciplines are so dependent upon animals. As Gautier writes, “Collaborating with our ‘inferior brothers’ is of the utmost importance. What is actually better than man is a guinea pig/*La collaboration de nos ‘frères inférieurs’ est de plus en plus indispensable [...] Ce qui y a de meilleur que l’homme...c’est le cochon d’inde*” (2). This statement suggests a possible reevaluation of the role that animals play in arts and crafts, the sciences and virtually all of human production as being a collaboration with other species.

Gautier points out the cruel nature of slaughtering animals in the name of scientific curiosity. The fact that animals die in the name of progress is “Cruel. Oh! What a cruel enigma/*Cruelle-oh! Combien cruelle énigme*” (1892, 2). In *Dingo*, Mirbeau also expresses his outrage against animal cruelty, asking how it is possible for humans who observe the habits of various species to harm them—he argues that animals reason, understand and speak (1913, 64). Furthermore, noting the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman life, Mirbeau claims that by hurting animals we are

actually hurting ourselves. Animals are the incarnation of freedom, which we kill by killing them. “And never an instant do we believe that it’s also intelligence, sensitivity and freedom that we kill by killing them/*Et jamais un seul instant, nous ne songeons que c'est de l'intelligence, de la sensibilité, et de la liberté que nous tuons, en les tuant*” (Mirbeau 1913, 64).

Similarly, in *In the Sky*, Lucien writes about his stay in Porte-Joie in a letter that indicates a decline of animals, which mirrors the decadent aesthetic. He makes the ironic statement that it is forbidden to go fishing when there is an abundance of fish, and it is permitted when there are none (Mirbeau 1989, 117). He also remarks that the shad fish, which swims upstream has a strange temperament (*mœurs étranges*). “They’d rather die than return to the sea. And do they ever die! All you see on the river are the shiny bellies of dead fish/*Il aime mieux mourir que de retourner à la mer! Et il meure! On ne voit sur le fleuve que des ventres brillants, de poissons morts*” (Mirbeau 1989, 144; 2015, 117). These shiny, dead marginal creatures who do not behave according to standard social mores or logical behavior are models for the decadent artist-animal, who, in turn, dies at the end of the novel. Both are presented as endangered species.

These traces of an ecological paradigm shift within an artistic novel could suggest that one role of the artist is to preserve the image of wildlife within his or her art. After all, Lucien’s father thought he was going to abandon painting for farming (Mirbeau 1989, 116). The novel presents the link between the agriculturalist and the artist: for the artist nurtures and fosters the creative “life” of nature in his or her paintings.

Similarly, according to Mirbeau, his friend Monet is so sensitive to the inner workings of the earth and heavens that he breathes life into his paintings. Mirbeau describes the impressionist’s work in an article in *Le Figaro* on March 10, 1889:

Everything is combined. Everything is in agreement with atmospheric laws, with the orderly and precise workings of earthly and celestial phenomena. That’s why he gives the complete illusion of life. Life sings in the musical composition of his distant landscapes; life flowers with the perfume of his wreaths./

Tout est combiné, tout s'accorde avec les lois atmosphériques, avec la marche régulière et précise des phénomènes terrestres ou célestes. C'est pourquoi il nous donne l'illusion complète de la vie. La vie chante dans la sonorité de ses lointains, elle fleurit, parfumée avec ses gerbes de fleurs... (Mirbeau 1993, 246)

Although it may be an “illusion” of life, his work is a microcosm for wilderness, filled with the sound of singing landscapes and the smell of flowers. In *In the Sky*, Lucien does succeed in painting several works. However, at the end of the novel, he becomes overwhelmed by the attempt to capture nature. “Forests float like oceans, the seas dishevel like forests, and flowers put me to sleep with their poisons. And they unleash a great madness, and a great terror/*Les forêts flottent comme des mers, les mers s'échevèlent comme des forêts, et les fleurs m'endorment de leurs poisons. Il se dégage de là, vois-tu, une grande folie et une grande terreur*” (Mirbeau 1989, 148; 2015, 122). While Monet’s works create an almost-living universe, Lucien’s fictional artistic works eventually create a warped, alternative reality that does not correspond to the laws of nature. Although Lucien was initially inspired by the ineffable quality of nature, his inability to capture it becomes frustrating and stifling. Thus, Michel and Nivet write that the novel describes the “suffering of the ideal, inaccessible chimera that poisons existence, that crushes the individual, leaving him or her panting and frustrated/*souffrance de l’idéal, chimère inaccessible, qui ‘empoisonne’ l’existence, écrase l’individu et le laisse pantelant et frustré*” (1989, 13). However, this notion of struggle and exasperation is also perhaps necessary for the production of art, especially one that defies human convention.

5.3 ENTER THE VOID: THE SPONTANEOUS GENERATION OF ART

In a way, Mirbeau argues that Monet’s art is an art of nothingness, an act of self-destruction. In an article titled “Claude Monet,” published in *Le Figaro* on November 21, 1884, Mirbeau writes that the impressionist has become “liberated from the conventions of the past and art disappeared, effaced itself and we only find ourselves in the presence of a nature completely overtaken and dominated by this miraculous painter/*libéré des conventions des réminiscences [...] L’art disparaît, s’efface et nous ne nous trouvons plus qu’en présence de la nature vivante, complètement conquise et domptée par ce miraculeux peintre*” (Mirbeau 1993, 23). Particularly in the later, more abstract paintings, Monet’s art even seems to efface itself. *Les Nymphéas (Les Nuages)* (1903) contains patches of grass next to a pond. On the bottom of the painting, the green patches become smaller and smaller, as if the grass is being “unpainted.” The reflections of two clouds in the pond form white, vacant holes in the center of the painting. Essentially, Monet made the very heart of the painting unfinished.

Perhaps *In the Sky*, with its narrative gaps and disjointed prose, is, in some ways, its textual equivalent. Monet's painting also challenges conventional concepts of space, causing the viewer to be unsure of what is sky and what is water. While at once emphasizing the unformed or the void, the painting also reinforces the unity of all forms of life. In *In the Sky*, Mirbeau, as a valiant defender of Monet and other impressionists, "revises the traditional account of God's creation of the world by substituting the oxymoron of divine creation through destruction" (Hawthorne 1987, 139). The oxymoron that Mirbeau proposes is that the artist must destroy all that is false or outmoded in order to produce a truly innovative creation. Thus, *In the Sky* attempts to be a "metaphysical revolt, a rebellion against all that oppresses and mutilates man, anguish, hallucinations, alternating between exaltation and depression, a perpetual quest after being deceived from absolutes in art and society—Beauty, Truth and Justice/*révolte métaphysique, rébellion contre tout ce qui opprime et mutilé l'homme, angoisses, et hallucinations, alternances d'exaltation et de dépression, quête perpétuellement déçue d'absolus en art et dans la société—le Beau, le Vrai, le Juste*" (Michel and Nivet 1989, 16). According to this statement, the novel revolts against the metaphysical constructs and impossible ideals, which prevent a person from seeing what truly exists in front of him or her.

The novel perhaps borrows from Eastern conceptions of space, as expressed in Japanese painting, which, as discussed in the chapter on Laforgue, greatly influenced impressionism. Lucien and Georges' obsession with the sky and space, as well as the consistent use of ellipses between words in the novel, reinforces the importance of space to the act of creation. In this sense, creation and space are one and the same for space is necessary for creation to exist. Japanese paintings often include a large space on the canvas as an indicator of the potential for creation—perhaps embodying the maxim found in the Buddhist *Heart Sutra*, "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form." Mirbeau was, after all, a great advocate for Eastern art, arguing that Japanese prints created "such an evolution in French painting at the end of the 19th century/*une telle évolution de la peinture française à la fin du XIX siècle*" (Mirbeau in Aitken and Delafond 2003, 219–220). The overbearing sky in the novel could be an image similar to open skies in Japanese art, symbolizing a blank canvas waiting to be filled. On the one hand, the weight of the immense sky is overwhelming, just as is the pressure for the writer and the artist to create. "The sky. Oh, the sky!... You don't know how it crushes me, how it's killing me!/*Le ciel!... Oh! le ciel!... Tu ne sais pas comme il m'écrase, comme il me tue!*"

(Mirbeau 1989, 26; 2015, 19). On the other hand, it is this blank sky that drives the artist and writer to attempt to fill the blank spaces that surround them. Interestingly, the sky was an inspiration to many artists during the *fin de siècle* and the début of the twentieth century. “Artists working in the styles of biomorphic abstraction found continued inspiration in astronomy, as many new galaxies were discovered and classified” (Gamwell 2002, 217). Although the characters of *In the Sky* feel crushed by the sky, it is important to recognize the sentiment of enormous potential for new discoveries in the sky that occurred during the same period.

Life’s energy pulses through Georges and propels him to the sky:

Yes, there was something in me that I had never known was there, something I’d never felt living in me, something I could not have defined, but which lifted me from the earth, made me light, almost weightless really—like in the night, in my dreams, when I traversed the skies with my feet in the void, my head in the stars, my arms stretched out and beating like wings./

Il y avait en moi quelque chose que je n’avais pas encore senti vivre en moi, quelque chose que je n’aurais pu définir mais qui me soulevait de terre, me rendait léger, presque impénétrable vraiment, comme lorsque la nuit, en rêve, je traversai des espaces aériens, les pieds dans le vide, le front dans les étoiles, les bras étendus et battant ainsi que les ailes. (Mirbeau 1989, 100; 2015, 85)

In this quotation, the creative drive is an indefinable biological process, beginning from the void, which radiates outward and animates one’s entire being. The phrase “something that I could not have defined” reinforces the ineffable nature of the creative drive that is in the physiological (“living in me”), cosmological (“the skies,” “the stars”) and subconscious (“in my dreams”) realms. The narrator’s biological drive to write propels him into the sky, above earthly human concerns. With his head in the stars, the narrator comes into contact with the unknown, irrational elements of nature. The narrator becomes bird-like, flapping his arms are if they were wings. However, like Icarus who soared too close to the sun, the creative person can also plummet to the ground. Man is not equipped to fly among the birds forever—and Georges and Lucien indeed fall. At the same time, this deterioration of the two men is integral to the imaginative process itself, for it lifts the writer and artist above human understanding.

Even after a painter’s demise, the forms on a canvas germinate and take on a life of their own. Hélène Trépanier comments, “Like the alchemist,

Lucien aspires to transform matter into a superior substance so that images and pictorial forms come to life/*À l'instar de l'alchimiste, Lucien aspire à transformer la matière en une substance supérieure afin que les images et les formes picturales prennent vie*” (Trépanier 1967, 54). Perhaps Lucien’s art is not so much a process of alchemy but of Lamarckian “spontaneous generation.” Mirbeau writes: “The painted faces came to a terrifying life—leaning over me with a supernatural stare/*Les figures peintes autour de moi s'animaient d'une vie terrifiante, tendaient vers moi des regards surnaturels*” (Mirbeau 1989, 92; 2015, 107). The animated figures in Lucien’s painting, which terrorize Georges, evoke Lamarck’s concept of “the power of life,” a natural force that stirs up the movement of internal fluids and causes the spontaneous generation of living creatures (Gregory 2003, 72).

Like Lamarck, who did not believe that God was necessary to generate life, Mirbeau does not mention the creator (Lucien) of the artistic life forms. He instead uses the reflexive verb to animate oneself (“*s'animer*”). Mirbeau proposes the idea that the painting can take on a life of its own and evolve into a creation that the artist never intended. This is similar to when Lucien asks Georges if something “pushes” him to write (Mirbeau 1989, 85). This idea that a biological impulse “propels” a creative person to write or paint something that is beyond the artist’s control dramatically contrasts with the institution of the Salon that judged art based more on the social class and the education of the artist than the work itself (Hoek 2001, 62). Instead, Mirbeau proposes an art that is constantly shifting, reinventing itself and evolving with time and with new viewers. The repetition of the word me (“*moi*”) in the above passage focuses on the perception of the viewer rather than the status of the artist. In *In the Sky*, the work of art itself is more important than the artist who creates it. Thus, the myth of “artist as animal” evolves in Mirbeau’s novel and becomes “the work of art as animal.”

Furthermore, he also elaborates upon his artistic study of manure, titled *Le Fumier*. He says that when a person looks at manure: “It’s a wonderful frenzy of germination, an enchantment of flora, of fauna, heads full of hair, an explosion of splendid life!/*C'est une folie de germination merveilleuse, une féerie de flores, de faunes, de chevelures, un éclatement de vie splendide!*” (Mirbeau 1989, 82; 2015, 97). Then, as soon as the artist blinks his or her eyes, the pile mutates, transforms and “becomes alive” in a new way (Mirbeau 1989, 97). Lamarck writes, “The excited movements in small gelatinous bodies that I described constitute life. These movements are what animate organisms/*Les mouvements excités dans le fluide propre des*

petits corps gélatinieux dont je viens de parler, constituent des lois en eux ce qu'on nomme la vie, car ils les animent" (Lamarck 1809, 177). Mirbeau's description of a heap of manure that becomes animate could also apply to a splotch of paint on the canvas—the artist cannot always control whether the paint drips or expands or merges with the other colors. It is as if the paint itself is alive and is creating the work of art in a dynamic way that goes beyond the scope of the painter's intention—thus removing the human from humanism.

Thus, when critics discuss the fact that the artist cannot always communicate his celestial vision, this notion is not a tragedy. The creative act can transcend the author's intention, and it can turn out to be something greater than his original vision. In Mirbeau's narrative, one commonality between an animal and an artist in the processes of creation is the lack of intentionality or will. As Lamarck points out concerning animals, "It's the power of their interior emotional state moved by need, that trains them and makes them act immediately, without premeditation and without using their will/*C'est la puissance de leur sentiment intérieur, ému par des besoins, qui les entraîne et les fait agir immédiatement, sans pré-méditation et sans le concours d'aucun acte de volonté de leur part*" (1809, 17). In this sense, the irrational, biological drive to create might be the same drive that causes the behavior of animals. This drive in Lamarckian terms is called *la force des choses* or simply *la vie*. "Indeed, this *force of things* that controls us when we start to feel it, and it is a power that people do not pay enough attention to...Thus, there are cases when our consequences are just predetermined and have nothing to do with will/*Or, cette force des choses qui nous maîtrise lorsque nous parvenons à la sentir, est une puissance à laquelle on ne donne pas assez d'attention.... Ainsi il y a des cas où nos conséquences sont forcées et ne permettent aucun arbitraire*" (1809, 3). Hence, the artist can be seen as "animal" because he is animated by this life force, and this life force also animates the content of his paintings.

Elénore Reverzy writes that Mirbeau's texts themselves function like a digestive tract that purges waste, which fertilizes new life (2004, 103). Manure is symbolic for the artistic process because it represents both decay and re-creation. It is excrement that fertilizes a multitude of flora and fauna. If the passage in which Georges envisions himself in outer space represents the macrocosm, this passage on manure represents the microcosm. The artist can draw from the infinite potential of lives that can germinate from a pile of manure, just as a single stroke on the canvas might

manifest itself in an infinite possibility of forms. In this sense, it is not accurate to describe this novel as one of mere impotence, for the artist is preoccupied with the seeds of creation:

September 27, 1890, Mirbeau writes to Monet: 'I see in your manure stacks the beautiful shapes and colors that are born from it. My how art is so small compared to that' [...] Mirbeau sees manure the symbol of eternal transmutation of material, at the heart of nature that makes life with death, beautiful with filth./

Le 27 septembre 1890, Mirbeau écrit à Monet: 'Je vois dans les tas fumants les belles formes et les belles couleurs qui naîtront de là! Comme l'art est petit à côté de ça!' [...] Mirbeau voit dans le fumier le symbole de l'éternelle transmutation de la matière, au sein d'une nature qui fait de la vie avec de la mort, du beau avec de l'immonde. (Michel and Nivet 1989, 146)

The author affirms that death and decay can contribute to new life and new ideas. Moreover, one could argue that Mirbeau foresaw the contemporary field of bioart, which, according to pioneer artist-scientist Joe Davis and his collaborators, uses laboratory practices to examine living systems (such as the manure pile) (Yetisen et al. 2015, 724). Interestingly, Paul Rothemund and Ashwin Gopinath, researchers at the California Institute of Technology, encoded van Gogh's *Starry Night* into living glowing bacterial DNA in 2016 using a technique called DNA origami (DNA Origami 2019, np). In bioart, microbes are often living and dying artistic subjects and creators of dynamic and transient colors and forms.

If the transmutation of material does exist, then nothing truly dies. A corpse can enrich the soil, giving food to new plant life that will sprout, grow, produce seeds and eventually die, and the cycle repeats. "All things have a form that renews itself, and this incessant renewal creates an evolution of atavisms that creates beings in a state of good or bad. Man, like all animals, is subject to this evolution/*Les formes qui prennent les choses se renouvellent et ce renouvellement incessant crée une évolution des atavismes qui perpétuent chez les êtres un état de bien ou du mal. L'homme, comme tout animal, étant sujet à cette évolution*" (Mirbeau 1991, 144). Mirbeau reinforces man's link to animals by emphasizing the idea that primitive traits can be passed on from generation to generation. The concept of renewal indicates that death can be seen as a transition to another state rather than an ending of life. Art that focuses on death and decay can also be viewed with the focus on rebirth and regeneration.

Mirbeau's novel reworks and elaborates upon several motifs that are present in the previous chapters of this book. First of all, *In the Sky* takes the narrative of the "artist as animal" to another level because, unlike the artists in the works of the Goncourt brothers and Laforgue, the artist is portrayed in *In the Sky* as a violent creature who attacks antiquated and insincere works of art and ideologies. Mirbeau thus develops an aesthetic of fear and horror that are in line with both the Decadent literary tradition and Darwinian thought. While Mirbeau's novella shares a similar depiction of the artist/assassin as found in *Thérèse Raquin*, unlike Laurent, Lucien is not motivated by women, fortune or fame, and he does not actually kill anyone. Lucien even proclaims that he only sleeps with his paintings (Mirbeau 1989, 94). The artist has a sincere mission to shatter the status quo and paint according to his unique perception.

However, like the protagonists of *Thérèse Raquin* and *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu*, Lucien's work against the grain of social mores and good taste leads to his societal ostracism and tragic death. In addition, by applying Lamarckian spontaneous generation to creativity, Mirbeau transforms the myth of the "artist as animal" to "the work of art as animal." Paintings thereby become creatures that can transform and evolve. Finally, *In the Sky* affirms the creative power of the minor—upholding animals as small as larvae or even the vast void from whence life can emerge.

To return to our discussion of the novel's place within contemporary animal studies, the association between animals and marginality in the novella may, at times, be more of a critique of humanity than an in-depth study of animals. As Miller illustrates in the context of Thomson, late nineteenth-century works may reduce animals to entities that evoke fear and horror, while simultaneously complementing contemporary animal theory's critique of anthropocentrism (2017, 190). The Decadent link between animals, especially arthropods, and the arts illustrates a shifting worldview that denies human exceptionalism in terms of creativity. One cannot ignore the vast number of animal companions that accompany the artist and writer in *In the Sky*. Perhaps we can engage with this story in a way that demonstrates that, as McHugh writes, "certain engagements with narrative configure people and animals as working together to do things that do not add up to a sum of individual efforts, and so invite more precise considerations of agency and narrative form" (2011, 5). At the end of the novella, Lucien locks himself in his room and desperately attempts to paint a live peacock. When he is unable to achieve his vision, he both kills himself and the bird. "Nearby was the peacock with its neck broken,

dead; and by the peacock law Lucien in a sea of blood, his beard matted with red clots, his eyes open mad and wide, his mouth open in a horrible grin/*Près de la toile renversée et crevée, près du paon mort, le col tordu, Lucien étendu, dans une mare de sang, toute sa barbe souillée de caillots rouges, Lucien, l'œil convulsant, la bouche ouverte en un horrible rictus, gisait*" (Mirbeau 1989, 144; 2015, 183). The lives of the painting, the peacock and the artist are interdependent. When one cannot live, the others cannot live either. The death of the protagonist could easily be interpreted as the failure of the avant-garde artist to fulfill his ideal. However, perhaps one could view Lucien's suicide "in the literal sense that there was no more to be said" (Chesterton 1917, 100). Critics have highlighted the many references to van Gogh in the novel, including his suicide. While van Gogh cut his own life short, he left behind revolutionary techniques and color theories which were employed, developed, altered and improved by artists for generations to come. The legacy of van Gogh did not die; the seeds that the artist planted germinated and evolved. Thus, the depiction of animal species in this text does not indicate weakness or impotence, but rather it indicates the debut of a modernist aesthetic.

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CHAPTER 6

Féline Fatale: The New Woman as Cat-Woman in Rachilde's *L'Animale*

One spring night, Laure Lordès climbed onto the roof of her Parisian apartment and frolicked with feral cats that wildly mated amid smokestacks and danced across mansard roofs. Laure, heroine of Rachilde's scandalous novel *L'Animale* (1893), discovers a biological and erotic affinity with cats. Created as a laboratory experiment by her parents in the small town of Estérac, where she has her first romantic encounter in a barn, Laure defies the constructs of natural and artificial. She moves to Paris with her lover Henri, but due to her sexual adventures, including a liaison with a one-eyed man and a preacher, he declares her unfit to be his wife. She finds true companionship with a stray feline named Lion. The character's transformation into a "cat-woman" reflects the common association between females and cats during this time period. From the catlike treachery of *Thérèse Raquin* to Manet's *Olympia* outstretched on a bed with a black cat, the trope of the *féline fatale* is embedded in nineteenth-century French culture and was synonymous with the avant-garde. This figure, like the spiders and flies that comprise Mirbeau's impressionistic web, is a Decadent antihero for both avant-gardists and females in the turn of the century (Fig. 6.1).

I inquire whether the cat-woman myth suggests the possibility of liberation from social, literary and aesthetic constraints. In my analysis of this novel by Rachilde (the *nom de plume* of Marguerite Vallette-Eymery) paired with literary and artistic renderings of cats and contemporary



Fig. 6.1 Félix Vallotton. *La Paresse*, 1896. Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain

theory that interweaves the disciplines of animal studies and feminism, I will argue that the cat-woman myth represents an ambivalent, “in-between” space between several boundaries of the *fin de siècle*: man and woman, human and animal, as well as technical and organic. In addition to representing fluctuating gender roles and social status for women, the *feline fatale* is a part of an industry-laden, urban aesthetic that still clings to its pastoral past. As Lippit argues, modernity itself can be defined by the vanishing of wildlife in our everyday lives and its reappearance in our cultural productions, such as technological media, literature and philosophy (Lippit 2000, 3). Much like the architectural and proto-cinematic arts of the *fin de siècle*, *L'Animale* infuses theriomorphic and technical imagery within the industrial cityscape of *fin de siècle* France.

This chapter expands the concept of the artist-animal beyond the male impressionist, whose story is told by a male writer, and encapsulates the

transitioning role for women in the dynamic arts of the *fin de siècle*. Associated with prostitution and sexual deviance, cats in this era symbolized female marginality. Women of the late nineteenth century were sometimes depicted as pets confined to interior spaces. In contrast, women found outside the home could be likened to feral animals that had no place in an urban center or a bourgeois family. These constructs began to shift, however, following Jules Ferry's universal education reforms (1881–1882), which granted education for girls. According to historian Mary Lou Roberts, the *fin de siècle* marked the birth of the “new woman” in France who subverted traditional gender norms by remaining single, participating in feminist activism, building careers or practicing the creative arts.

Although most are not known today, the number of female writers in France, many of them authors of children's fiction, soared to over 2000 by 1894 (Dauphiné 1991, 39). Female impressionist painters such as Morisot, Cassatt and Marie Bracquemond had paved the way for the artists of L'Union des Femmes Peintres Sculpteurs, Graveurs to form in 1890. In addition to painting, the performing and proto-cinematic arts, in which women played key roles, also characterized the Belle Époque. Kicking their heeled boots in their illustrious cancan dances, performing artists such as Louise Weber (stage name “La Goulue,” meaning “The Glutton”) illuminated the Moulin Rouge and the Chat Noir cabarets. During the age of dynamic mass entertainment, such as moving pictures and popular theater, daily life became increasingly spectacular.

The cat-woman is a species of artist-animal that, appearing at the end of the century, is equal parts *techne* and organic. Cat-women artists do not stare at caged lions in the Jardin des Plantes and paint them as free. They jump in and out of windows and dance with the miniature lions that roam the Parisian alleyways. According to Roberts, “Paris became less a meeting ground for coherent social groups, where the cultural signs of gender and class were well understood, and more a series of images arbitrarily consumed in public spaces designed for that purpose” (Roberts 2005, 223). Literary and artistic salons found in both public and private spaces such as the Chat Noir and Rachilde's home created a fluid boundary between the interior and the exterior. As opposed to restrictive academic institutions, women and otherwise minor figures could carve a particular niche in the popular arts and literary avant-garde. Female artist-animals, like cats in the glow of the moonlight, which hopped from Haussmann-era balconies to gas lamp-lined streets, dwelled among the margins of society and escaped the established order.

6.1 ANIMALE DES LETTRES

A pioneer of the Decadent movement, the author herself could be an example of the liberated “new woman,” or even “cat-woman.” Rachilde’s works were considered scandalous because they depict depraved sexuality, bestiality and revolutionary characters. Known as “Mademoiselle Baudelaire,” Rachilde received a permit from the Paris police to cross-dress. As the author lived from 1860 to 1953 (Hawthorne 1987, 13), her works span across two centuries and share commonalities with literary movements varying from Symbolism to Futurism to the Theater of the Absurd. The wife of Alfred Vallette, the director of the publishing company *Mercure de France*, Rachilde held weekly salons, which Verlaine, Remy de Gourmont, Colette, Alfred Jarry and Apollinaire attended (Dauphiné 1991, 88).

Animals are central to Rachilde’s novels, stories and plays, whose titles include *L’Araignée de Cristal* (1892), *Le Meneur de Louves* (1926), *Le Chat jaune* (1877) and *Le Théâtre des bêtes* (1926). Rachilde even declared that she had animal origins, claiming that her great-grandfather was a religious cleric who committed blasphemy by marrying. “Besides, it makes me a creature cursed by the church since I come from a sacrilege, a were-wolf. When I learned that, I was filled with an insane joy; I finally belong to the animal race/*En outre cela fait de moi une créature maudite par l’église puisque je proviens d’un sacrilège, un loup-garou. Quand j’appris cela, je fus remplie d’une joie folle; j’appartiens enfin à la race animale*” (Rachilde 1942, 54–55). Claiming to be the descendent of a sacrilegious human-animal hybrid, Rachilde fuses together pseudo-evolutionary theories with the avant-garde imagination.

In *Asymptote, An Approach to Decadent Fiction* (2009), Ziegler points out the fallacious tendency for critics to conflate the monstrous protagonists of Decadent fiction with their authors. The scholar argues that many Decadent writers construct personae, often perverse and grotesque, in part for marketing purposes and in part to play with societal stereotypes and projections. Fittingly, Rachilde created and reinforced her own identity as an author animal, and a cat-woman in particular. As the author was most commonly identified with felines, Cazals created a portrait of Rachilde as a cat, and Albert Samain described her in a poem as “An enigmatic cat trapped in the body of a woman/Prowls with velvet steps, in her flesh, in her soul/And, a wild cat, languished, stretches out in her heart/*Le chat énigmatique enfermé dans la femme/Rôde à pas de velours, dans sa chair, dans son âme/Et, fauve, enlangouré, s'étire dans son Coeur*” (Mélanges Rachilde 1983, 81–82).

The author's reputation as a "cat-woman" is ostensibly antithetical to her mission to be considered on par with male writers. Aware that the concept of nature is often coded as feminine, Rachilde toys with the stereotype that women are closer to animals than men. In *Le Hors nature* (1897), Rachilde proclaims, "Woman has an inferior will. She is an animal/*La femme est une volonté de qualité inférieure [...] elle est la bête*" (Rachilde 1897, 20). Paradoxically, "Rachilde who presented herself as a 'man of letters' also thinks herself as the 'Animale,' following Laure Lordès, heroine of the novel that carries that title, the mutation is rendered possible by the pen of the novelist 'Animale of letters' / *Rachilde qui se présentait comme 'homme de lettres'* s'est aussi voulue 'l'animale,' à l'instar de Laure Lordès, l'héroïne du roman qui porte ce titre [...] la mutation est rendue possible par la plume de la romancière: 'Animale de lettres'" (*Mélanges Rachilde* 1983, 82). This quotation creates parallels between Laure, the cat-woman character, and the writer herself, whose creative process is a "mutation" from human to animal. The title "Animale de lettres" seemingly contradicts Rachilde's combat against essentialism.

It is, of course, paramount that we do not confuse the intentions and identity of the fictional protagonist with the author. However, as Debarati Sanyal, a scholar of nineteenth-century French literature, illuminates in her comparison between Laure's character and Rachilde's self-description, the novelist's accounts of female animals could be deconstructed as mimicries of gender narratives. "In these instances, she [Laure] performs the derogatory scripts assigned to her—as hysterical female—much the way Rachilde 'performs' her stereotype as a precociously perverse female whose pen is governed by her instincts" (Sanyal 2006, 147–148). I believe that such a performance, regardless of intent, also escapes majoritarian discourse that is supposedly driven by rational thought. Rather than either complying with or revolting against gender roles, by claiming to "become animal," Rachilde's character moves between them.

In her bestiary titled *Le Théâtre des bêtes*, Rachilde herself claims in the preface "I am often this dog... or this cat... or this wolf/*Je suis souvent ce chien..., ou ce chat..., ou ce loup*" (Rachilde 1926b, 3). In claiming to be diverse species of animals, Rachilde creates new literary identities and moves beyond the confines of the "I," as a female human. Similarly, in his contemplation of the relationship between his cat and himself, Derrida questions his identity of being "a living creature of the masculine sex" (Derrida 2008, 58). The philosopher's meditation on his cat articulates a fluidity of being. The philosopher suggests not to overcome difference but

to embrace the multiple potential differences that might or might not exist in terms of gender and species (Weil 2008). He also suspects that an autobiography cannot reinforce one's gender but rather is the telling of multiple selves. "We no longer know how many we are then, all males and females of us. And I maintain that autobiography has begun there" (Derrida 2008, 58). This gender/species fluidity is a foundation of Rachilde's autobiographical writings. As a female writer, she often prefers to identify as a man and presents androgynous characters that are opposed to reproduction and child-rearing (Sanyal 2006, 143). Within the pages of Rachilde's novels, one finds oneself running, howling and screeching with wolves, dogs and cats, which slip between interior and exterior spaces and transgress neatly defined class and gender roles.

Like other female writers after her who deplored the term "feminism," Rachilde vehemently disagreed with the feminist cause, arguing that her own lack of conformity operated on an individual but not a societal level. *L'Animale* is the tale of a woman who defies the institutions of marriage and family. According to Édith Silve, editor of *L'Animale*, Laure's metamorphosis into an animal undermines traditional roles established for women (Silve 1993, 12). However, can one definitively claim that Laure is a fictional example of an empowered "new woman" of the *Belle Époque* when she depends on liaisons with men for survival? I will analyze how the figure of the "cat-woman" represents the modern woman who transgresses the boundary between the domestic and the exterior realms. This metamorphosis from woman to cat reflects the ambivalent status of women during the *Belle Époque*, and also the transitional nature of this period in general. Previous scholarship on Rachilde by critics such as Melanie Hawthorne have attempted to locate her place within the feminist literary canon. I contribute to these discussions by concentrating on the figure of "cat-woman" as emblematic of not only of the nineteenth-century version of the modern woman but also of modern life. Kete argues that nineteenth-century petkeeping reinforced class divisions—some animals were fortunate enough to become the sterilized, well-kept pets of the bourgeoisie, distinguishing themselves from the poor, marginal or potentially diseased cats and dogs of the streets (Kete 1995, 2). In *L'Animale*, just when the cat-woman Laure is on the cusp of achieving bourgeois status by creating a life with a man who had initially demanded sexual favors for money, her beloved cat Lion becomes rabid and mauls her. Transformed into an animal, Laure falls from the rooftops into the gutter and dies.

[...] she stopped herself, crying over her lost beauty, and the woman metamorphosed into animal ... still crawling passed through the opening of the skylight, escaping between the pieces of iron and glass that slashed her skin, but still carrying her ferocious male that clung to her neck. Together the two rabid animals rolled along the crystal roof./

[...] elle s'arrêta, pleurant sa beauté perdue; et la femme métamorphosée en bête, rampant toujours passa par l'ouverture du vasistas, laissant entre le fer et le verre des morceaux de sa peau tailladée, mais portant encore son mâle féroce qui s'agrippait à sa nuque. Ensemble les deux bêtes enragées se roulèrent le long du toit de cristal. (Rachilde 1993, 268–269)

Laure, whose body is bitten by a rabid cat and is also pierced by the modern materials of iron and glass, experiences a physical metamorphosis that is at once industrial and organic. While shattering the literal glass ceiling of apartment roof—the transparent material that also separates humans and animals in Laforgue's aquarium—Laure becomes infused with her cat Lion. However, this cat-woman figure is far from empowered.

In the novel, the woman, fallen out of the comfortable “nest” of the home, perishes on the city street: “While the woman’s body was crushed on the pavement, the man with infinite precaution to wake her up softly, turned the key in the lock/*Pendant que le corps de la femme s'écrasait sur le pavé de la rue, l'homme, avec des précautions infinies, pour la réveiller plus doucement, tournait la clef de la serrure*” (Rachilde 1993, 269). This ambiguous ending thus raises the question whether women’s affinity with cats is symbolic of their containment or their independence? In Rachilde’s *L’Animale* and *La Panthère* (published in 1894 about a panther who devours a zookeeper’s daughter), a wild *fauve* attacks a tamed woman. Ziegler argues that there is a tension between the wild cat and the house cat, which represents two types of women: one domestic and the other independent (Ziegler 1998). One could also raise the question, does Laure’s “metamorphosis” into a rabid animal, which suggests the devouring of traditional constructions of human female identity, indicate the possibility of empowerment in the Third Republic that transcends gender and species binaries? Or does the novel present the dichotomy between “la femme” and “l’homme,” where the latter possesses liberty to come and go as he pleases and the former is cast out of the home to die in the gutter? In a Post-Haussmann era, which geometricized Paris through urban reforms dating from 1853–1870, a handful of marginal spaces served as artistic outlets free from societal and gender expectations. Decadent fiction, the

dynamic arts of the *fin de siècle*, and the apartment rooftops where cats leap from the bourgeois interior to the industrial exterior are stages for the fluid expression and creative liberation of Belle Époque.

6.2 THE SECOND SPECIES: FELINES, FEMININITY AND THE AVANT-GARDE

The intersection of feminist and animal theory, a fruitful area of research for the past few decades, may shed insight into the cat-woman myth in the Belle Époque. While Simone de Beauvoir's solution to feminine essentialism in the *Second Sex* (1949) was to deny the association between women and animals and affirm females as rational beings on par with men, contemporary theory affirms a more pluralistic and encompassing view (Donovan and Adams 2007, 131). According to Weil, the study of shared life between species erodes the constructs of not only of human uniqueness, privilege and power but of masculine dominance as well. Human exceptionalism "perpetuates a dualist thinking that pits an active (masculine) human master against a passive (and feminized) animal slave" (Weil 2012, 138–139). Clearly, in Rachilde's narrative, as illustrated in the previous passage from the novel, the man who turns the key in the lock has more liberty than the woman he believes to be trapped inside (Rachilde 1993, 269). However, this master/slave narrative is further complicated by the fact that her cat is the one who mauls her and throws her onto the pavement. In this moment, Lion destroys markers of human feminine identity ("she stopped herself, crying over her lost beauty") and, instead, recreates Laure's identity as an animal surrounded by industry: "Together the two rabid animals rolled along the crystal roof." The novel thus indicates that the cat-woman myth embodies ambivalent relationship between several thresholds of the *fin de siècle*, including gender identity.

This ambivalence contrasts with the clarity of contemporary theory by critics such as Rosi Braidotti, who argues that the post-1968 "anti-humanist" philosophy disavows dialectical thinking of man versus the other (whether woman, native, animal or the environment), which serves to reinforce his superiority (Braidotti 2013, 29). Similarly, Haraway's *When Species Meet* also rejects the dualism between technological and organic, critiquing the perception that "gods, machines, animals, monsters, creepy crawlies, women, servants and slaves and non citizens in general" are "others" to man (2007, 10). Rather than outrightly rejecting these binaries, Rachilde's novel plays with stereotypes that conflate women, animals and machines as the opposite

of men. For example, in the above passage from the novel, Laure escapes “between the pieces of iron and glass that slashed her skin, but still carrying her ferocious male that clung to her neck” (Rachilde 1993, 269). Laure is a hybrid of industrial materials who still embodies the maternal image of a mother cat carrying her baby. Even in this amalgam, the woman is still trapped and contained.

However, by the 1990s, the feminist ethic of care, developed by pioneers in the field Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams, affirms the often perceived “feminine” values of attention, compassion and communication as the basis of an ethical practice. “The feminist ethic of care regards animals as individuals who do have feelings, who can communicate those feelings, and to whom therefore humans have moral obligations” (Donovan and Adams 2007, 2–3). Rachilde herself became an animal rights activist after seeing experiments conducted on mice as a lab assistant in her youth, during which she also experienced sexual harassment. The author henceforth claimed to distrust men in science (Hawthorne 1987, 190). According to Donovan and Adams, the feminist care tradition can be traced back to the animal defense and the anti-vivisection movements of the nineteenth century, whose supporters argued the cruel rationalism of science and the invasion of women’s and animal’s bodies (Donovan and Adams 2007, 8).

We will now turn to a cultural history of cats, who at the turn of the century elucidated the perceived link between animals and female sexuality as well as bohemia (Kete 1995, 123). Quoting Champfleury’s belief that to understand cats “one must be a woman or a poet,” Kete writes, “The nineteenth century’s appreciation of the cat rested for a long time on these two adjunct ideals contained uneasily within bourgeois culture. Within the logic of pet keeping, cats were feminine, philosophical or both” (Kete 1995, 126). Because cats may represent “both,” they subvert traditional dialectics, which would oppose females and philosophy or the arts. As Kete argues, the configurations of “human and animal, outsider and insider, being and non being” were in transition in nineteenth-century culture (Kete 1995, 133). Cats are, thus, the ultimate embodiment for the female artist or writer who does not conform to traditional dualistic thinking. Conversely, cats, synonymous with promiscuity and bohemia, were rehabilitated into bourgeois culture at the *fin de siècle* (Kete 1995, 116). If cats at the end of the century had a place in the bourgeois interior, does this mean that “cat-women” were finally assimilated into French society, and, in effect, tamed?

While cats have coexisted among humans for thousands of years, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that cats became a celebrated symbol of the avant-garde. A 2007 study by scientist Carlos A. Driscoll suggests that cats were domesticated in the Near East during Neolithic times, when the first agricultural societies developed (Handwerk 2018, np). As villagers began to store wheat and barley, cats protected the grain from rodents. Snaring and devouring pesky mice in storehouses, cats have been an integral part of farm life for centuries. However, as cities encroached upon rural communities, felines were forced to adapt to urban life—either as endearing bourgeois pets or as scavengers evading starvation or internment.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, while purposeful breeding for pedigreed cats began in England, Louis Pasteur's germ theory had altered the public view of street animals as filthy, diseased and hazardous (Wastlhuber 1991, 6). This time gave rise to the *fourrière*, stemming from the word *fourrure* or “fur,” which is an impound lot for cars, lost objects or animals (Rubin 2003, 10). According to a mandate created on February 28, 1839, in Paris, stray animals would be placed in cages and watched by a guard. If the animals appeared to be carrying a contagious disease, a vet would place them in an isolated area (Larousse 1991, 685). As frightening, possibly sick creatures who lived on the fringes of society, cats represented the avant-garde spirit. Kete writes, “Like the intellectual, the cat held in limbo, so to speak, values forced to the margins of bourgeois life including the supreme individualism of genius and the liberty and integrity of an artist who refused to be sold out” (Kete 1995, 125). According to Laurence Bobis, an art historian, cats were part of an aesthetic that overturned cultural norms, favoring that which is deviant, diabolical, magical and sexual (Bobis 2012, 122). The association between the mysterious, somewhat independent nature of felines, female sensuality and the imagination is not unique to modernity. Claiming to be a *historiogriffe*, a pun on historiography and claws, Jules Champfleury writes that cats have been linked to women and the fantastic since ancient Egypt. “Women, fantasy, cats! How to visibly trace this mysterious connection that links together such a trilogy?/Femmes, *Fantaisie*, *Chats!* Comment tracer visiblement le mystérieux trait d’union qui relie une telle trilogie?” (Champfleury et al. 1870, 119). Certainly, in Jean de La Fontaine’s fable “The Cat Metamorphosed into a Woman,” written in 1668, the protagonist successfully wishes for his cat to turn into a woman. However, when his new bride spends all of her time chasing mice instead of being with him, he is terribly disappointed.

Cats are a symbol of feminine sexuality: the *double entendre* of *la chatte* means a female cat and female genitalia. In the words of Baudelaire, in “Le Chat,” “Now while my fingertips caress at leisure/, Your head and wiry curves,/ And that my hand’s elated with the pleasure/, Of your electric nerves,/ I see my woman in spirit.../*Lorsque mes doigts caressent à loisir/ Ta tête et ton dos élastique/ Et que ma mains’envire du plaisir/ De palper ton corps électrique/ Je vois ma femme en esprit...*” (Baudelaire 1995, 82). The alternating possessive adjectives (“*mes*,” “*ta*,” “*ton*,” “*ma*,” “*ton*,” “*ma*”) (my, your, my, your, my) provoke the image of a sexual exchange in which the cat is a surrogate for a woman (Baudelaire 1995, 82). Aside from arousing fantasies, the perceived link between females and cats has often been misogynistic. In “Origine de la femme, ou la Queue du chat” (1843), the author modifies the Book of Genesis. Instead of Adam’s rib, woman was created from the tail of a cat. According to the author, this origin explains the seduction and treachery of women: “Let’s scold snarling, wicked, rancorous women, who, from the clever cat, by their own bite, /Have in their hearts the tail, and the claw, and the teeth [of a cat]/*Laissons gronder femmes bargneuses, acariâtres, rancuneuses, qui, du chat malin, par leurs propres mordants, /Ont dans leur cœur la queue, et la griffe, et les dents/*” (Anonymous 1843, 6). The author claims that women’s supposedly vicious nature is as harmful as cat’s claws and teeth.

L’Animale also alludes to the origin myth in relation to cats but focuses on the “queue,” which means tail and is also a colloquial expression for the male genital organ. Rachilde claims that cats cannot resist dangling, serpentine objects because their ancestor was Eve’s cat, who observed Satan’s snake.

That’s their folly, their ideal. They see it from every side, on every rug, in every rut. The true poets that they are, they would leave their cat food to follow, the thread of the Virgin in the air./

C’est leur folie, leur idéal; ils le voient de tous les côtés, dans tous les tapis, dans toutes les ornières, sur les meubles et sur les toits. En vrais poètes qu’ils sont, ils lâcheraient la pâtee pour aller suivre, dans l’air le passage d’un fil de la Vierge. (Rachilde 1993, 23)

For the author, cats are true poets because they see the spiritual in all that exists in their never-ending quest to hunt the primeval serpent.

Rachilde reworks Baudelaire’s poetic mission addressed to the reader of *Les Fleurs du mal* to note that which is evil: “It’s the Devil that holds the thread of all that moves us!/*C’est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous*

remuent?" (Baudelaire 1995, 49). As "poets," cats are transfixed with the strings that the grand puppet master (Satan in the case of Baudelaire, the Virgin in the case of Rachilde) dangles. The novel adds feral cats to the Baudelairian menagerie of vices, which includes jackals, panthers, monkeys, scorpions and snakes as vicious beings that are less threatening than the vice of boredom (Baudelaire 1995, 50). "Transfigured by Baudelaire, the cat can incarnate both woman and man, the singular and the multiple, the lover, the wise man and the poet himself/*Transfiguré par Baudelaire, le chat peut incarner tout à la fois la femme et l'homme, l'un et le multiple, l'amoureux, le savant et le poète lui-même*" (Bobis 2012, 122).

Due to their quixotic nature and their refusal of domination, many rebellious artists and writers of the time related to cats. James H. Rubin states that sensitive souls, including women, poets and novelists, understood felines because they too "are moved by a nervous system of exquisite delicacy" (Rubin 2003, 15). Huysmans, the leader of the Decadent movement and a tremendous influence on Rachilde, felt a symbiotic relationship with cats, and he believed that gutter cats had more dignity than dogs. He revealed to Georges Docquois that in terms of animals, "I don't truly like cats; I love them insanely, for their positive traits in spite of their numerous defects. I wouldn't know how to live without a cat/*Je n'aime, en vérité que les chats; mais je les aime déraisonnablement, pour leur qualités et en dépit de leurs nombreux défauts...je ne saurais vivre sans un chat*" (Docquois 1895, 165–166).

The black cat in Manet's *Olympia* was one of the most celebrated and scorned cats in nineteenth-century painting. Cham's famous caricature of the painting features an enraged dark feline with an erect tail, alluding to the prostitute's sexuality and the possible disease of syphilis. The cat, with its back arched and tail raised, confronts the viewer with its direct gaze. The feline is connected to both the reclining prostitute and the domestic servant and is thus associated with forced servitude and subversion. The cat's presence could thus also represent Manet himself. Both uninhibited artists and cats are bound by economic constraints and are dependent on others. "So the cat, even more than Olympia herself, was the artist's *alter ego*, a symbolic stand-in" (Rubin 2003, 20).

As in some ways a textual interpretation of *Olympia*, *Thérèse Raquin* includes the inauspicious character of François, Madame Raquin's cat, which boldly watches Laurent and Thérèse. "He examined them with care, without blinking his eyes, lost in a sort of diabolical ecstasy/*Il semblait les examiner avec soin, sans cligner les paupières, perdu dans une sorte*

d'extase diabolique" (Zola 1953, 63). Extending her hands like claws and arching her back, Thérèse jokingly pretends to speak for him to reveal the lovers' illicit affair: "Monsieur and Madame are kissing very hard in the bedroom/*Monsieur et Madame s'embrassent très fort dans la chambre*" (Zola 1953, 64). In this metamorphosis, Zola suggests the mutable boundaries between women and cat, which is not limited by physique or language. Both are supposedly diabolical in nature.

While often considered sexist in spirit, the prints of Swiss Symbolist artist Félix Vallotton, who created a portrait of Rachilde for *Le Livre des masques* in 1898, pair women, cats and literature, often in interior spaces. In *La Paresse* (1896), a nude woman reclines face down on a black-and-white-patterned quilt stroking a cat. As both the women and the cat are uniformly white with little detail, it appears that the cat is simply another appendage of the woman. Similarly, in Vallotton's woodcut *Ex Libris L. Joly*, created for a patron who owned a bookshop, a black cat crouches in the shadows as two white cats drawn with simple lines blend into the scattered pages of an assortment of books. Featuring a haphazard arrangement of books defying order and logic and overturned by cats, the woodcut manifests the essence of the Decadent movement. The above examples illustrate a history of French writing on felines' relationship to both avant-garde art and femininity, primarily from a male perspective. In the next section, we will evaluate the ways in which Rachilde's hybrid characters bolster and permeate gender and species lines.

6.3 FELINE FRANKENSTEIN: RACHILDE'S ARTIFICIAL ARTIST-ANIMALS

Unlike the works discussed in previous chapters, *L'Animale* does not focus on an artist protagonist who could be associated with the impressionist movement, but, instead, a particular literary and artistic trope of the *fin de siècle*. In the novel, while Laure lives in an apartment that formerly belonged to a photographer, the novel describes the cats that leap across its rooftops as the true artists. They are "true poets" and "ballet dancers" (Rachilde 1983, 23–24). The author proposes a Decadent variation on the artist as animal myth, in which female animals animate their creations with technical artifice. Such dynamic art forms reflect the performing and proto-cinematic arts of the turn of the century. Photographer Eadweard Muybridge created the first motion picture called *The Horse in Motion* in 1878, which captured the full range of motion of a horse's legs

when galloping. Rachilde's novel also makes allusion to the shadow theater of the Chat Noir cabaret, opened in 1881, in which moving silhouettes created fantastical images (Fields 1993, 33). The myriad of arts in the Belle Époque liberated the psyche and made the impossible now possible—shifting and reshaping formerly concrete categories such as man, woman, human and animal.

L'Animale commences with Laure, restlessly walking around her room at night, unable to sleep. “Decidedly her nerves revolted, and she could not find the reason for her painful insomnia that persecuted her for months/*Décidément ses neufs se révoltaient, et elle ne pouvait plus trouver la raison de ces insomnies douloureuses qui la persécutaient depuis ces mois*” (Rachilde 1983, 15). Adhering to the Zola's credo that writing must focus on “this victory of nerves over blood/*cette victoire des neufs sur le sang*” (Zola 1879, x), the protagonist's physiological system dominates her actions, operating without regard to “masculine” reason. Tormented by violent, nervous shakes, she becomes a nocturnal animal. However, the author rejects “nature” as a concrete and immutable construct separate from art and artifice. Her characters find themselves in an artificial jungle; they are wrapped in plastic vines and ravaged by beasts.

Rachilde's cat-women and artist-animals are not limited to *L'Animale*—but appear also in her most notorious work *Monsieur Vénus*, in which the sadistic Mademoiselle Raoule de Vénérande transforms Jacques Silvert, a florist and failed painter, into her “mistress.” This shocking reverse of gender roles is accompanied by the more traditional association of women with cats and men with dogs, a narrative found in Darwin's works, which we will examine shortly. In *Monsieur Vénus*, Monsieur de Raittolbe, an aristocrat, asks for Raoule's hand in marriage, “to chase the tiger in the Vénérande park, a tiger disguised as an amazon/*pour chasser le tigre dans le parc de Vénérande, un tigre affublé d'une amazone*” (Rachilde 1926a, 20). The nobleman realizes the difficulty of taming this wild creature even though she is confined within her aristocratic milieu. Raoule has the spirit of an Amazon woman, a skillful female warrior according to Greek legend.

Raoule, the tigress, dominates the weak and effeminate Jacques, who is compared to a dog. The privileging of the savage feminine *fauve* over the domesticated, male canine illustrates a shift toward a novel, Decadent aesthetic that challenges gender roles. In the beginning of the novel, Jacques incarnates the myth of the artist-animal:

Under his dark eyebrow, his eye was strange, though with a stupid expression. This man watched like suffering dogs beg, with a vague humidity on the eyeballs. These tears were always touching in an atrocious manner./

Sous son sourcil noir, assez délié, son œil était étrange, quoique d'une expression bête. Il regardait, cet homme, comme implorent les chiens souffrants, avec une vague humidité sur les prunelles. Ces larmes d'animal poignent toujours d'une manière atroce. (Rachilde 1926a, 20)

Like Laforgue, Rachilde focuses on the gaze of the artist, expressing the “strangeness” of his eye and his animal expression. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Humans and Animals*, Darwin argues that humans and other animals share similar expressions of pain: “After prolonged suffering the eyes become dull and lack expression, and are often slightly suffused with tears. The eyebrows not raised are rendered oblique, which is due to their inner ends being raised” (Darwin 1872, 179). The suffering painter stares in a similar manner to a begging dog, suggesting his desire and emotional torment. Jacques’ association with a dog also illustrates his servile nature and Raoule’s dominance. As Darwin writes, “The feeling of affection of a dog towards his master is combined with a strong sense of submission, which is akin to fear” (Darwin 1872, 120). Dogs were the preferred pet of the bourgeoisie until the turn of the century. Cats were seen as independent, free spirits, which made them appealing to avant-garde painters and writers (Rubin 2003, 10).

As dogs are considered domestic and cats are considered elusive and untamed, it is interesting that the former is associated with men and the latter is associated with women. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Humans and Animals*, Darwin himself describes these companion animals as gendered, using masculine pronouns to describe dogs and feminine ones for cats:

She now stands upright with her back slightly arched, which makes the hair appear rather rough, but it does not bristle; her tail, instead of being extended and lashed from side to side...Let it further be observed how widely different is the whole bearing of an affectionate cat from that of a dog, when his body crouching and flexuous, his tail lowered and wagging, and ears depressed, he caresses his master. (Darwin 1872, 57)

Whereas the female cat lashes its tail in anger, the male dog wags its tail in affection and cuddles with his master. Rachilde’s *feline fatale* was built on a particular archetype of women as flighty, cryptic and cruel as opposed to

doglike men who are supposedly transparent and straightforward. The “cat-woman” figure, reinforced by natural sciences and popularized by art and literature, became a miscreant of modernity.

In contrast, dogs tended to represent the bourgeois, and, sometimes, the banal. As an obedient companion and a mediocre painter, the doglike Jacques herds together a group of sheep in his pastoral painting. However, he fails to paint in a naturalistic manner. “From a quick glance, Raoule embraced a landscape without air, where five or six sheep were stuck together on tender grass with such a respect to laws of perspective that by borrowing them from each other, two of them seemed to possess five legs/*D'un coup d'œil rapide, Raoule embrassa un paysage sans air, où rageusement cinq ou six moutons ankylosés passaient du vert tendre, avec un tel respect des lois de la perspective, que par voie d'emprunt, deux d'entre eux paraissaient posséder cinq pattes*” (Rachilde 1926a, 30). The gaze shifts from Jacques to Raoule, who glances rapidly (“*D'un coup d'œil rapide*”) at the unrealistic looking sheep who appear stiff and deformed (“*ankylosés*”) with extraneous limbs. The rigidity of these animal forms contrasts with the energetic movement of the cats in *L'Animale*.

Furthermore, Rachilde highlights the contradiction that adherence to the laws of perspective distorts reality, possibly critiquing academic training as untrue to nature. Rachilde also denies the possibility of natural expression unmediated by artifice. Raoule is an artist herself because she replaces that which is assumed to be “natural” with craft. As a final creative act after Jacques death, Raoule commissions a sculpture in his image, integrating his hair, eyelashes, teeth and nails with wax and metal. “A spring, arranged inside the flanks, corresponds to the mouth and animates it/*Un ressort, disposé à l'intérieur des flancs, correspond à la bouche et l'anime*” (Rachilde 1926a, 91). A.E. Carter writes that artificiality is the key component of Decadent literature, which delighted in the nature-culture division. “They accepted civilization as corrupt, but take a perverse pleasure in that very corruption, preferring the civilized to the primitive and the artificial to the natural” (Carter 1978, 25). In *Monsieur Vénus*, Rachilde thus proposes an aesthetic that does not stem from the body of the artist-animal, but rather one that incorporates his body parts into an animate, artificial machine.

Conceived in a laboratory experiment and born under angelica plants, the cat-woman protagonist of *L'Animale* incarnates the Rachildian ideal of the synthetically natural. Laure’s association with the “*angélique*,” possessing a saintly name and medicinal qualities, but also an appearance similar to poisonous species of plants, reinforces the dualistic perception of women at the time. Born with green veins under white skin (“*vertes sur sa*

peau blanche”), Laure is portrayed as a species of flora in addition to feline. Laure’s varying descriptions as a cat, a plant and a machine illustrate the uncertain and mutable place of women (as well as humanity in general) during the Belle Époque. I emphasize the ways in which Rachilde’s focus on the nonhuman liberates, to some extent, women from customary roles as well as literary convention.

Laure’s mechanical nature stems from her father’s profession as a robotic notary, “The mechanic for money/*La mécanique pour l’argent*,” and her parents’ inability to conceive naturally (Rachilde 1993, 32). They instead decide to “fabricate” a child by concocting aphrodisiacs and potions to nourish her (Rachilde 1993, 33). “After the birth of their daughter, their kitchen still looked like a chemistry laboratory/*Après la naissance de leur fille, leur cuisine conserva des allures de laboratoire de chimie*” (Rachilde 1993, 33). Formed by a cocktail of organic and synthetic material, the protagonist is an artistic creation akin to Jacques in *Monsieur Vénus* or Frankenstein’s monster. In integrating fictionalized practices of artificial fertilization into her novel, Rachilde’s narrative circumvents the need for a nuclear family and thus defies literary convention.

Decadent authors were hostile to maternity, which they found banal, and often created female characters who were sterile (de Palacio 1993, 237). This period had witnessed dramatic achievements in reproductive science, such as artificial insemination in 1884, by physician William Pancoast (Bryant 2013, np). In 1890, scientist Walter Heap produced the first successful embryo transfer in rabbits (Biggers 1991, 173). Birth control methods also improved after rubber prophylactics were produced in the mid-nineteenth century (Youssef 1993, 226–228). Such innovations afforded women more freedom to choose whether to become mothers, partake in unorthodox sexual practices or to create alternative families. *L’Animale* illustrates new configurations of family relationships within this era of industrial and scientific breakthroughs—where the concept of “natural” diminished.

For Rachilde, perversion and bestiality equate to sexual liberation. After Laure leaves the fertile vegetable garden of her family farm for Henri’s towering apartment building in Paris, this plant-like woman becomes consumed by sexual and maternal sentiments for cats. These animals thus become substitutes for both lovers and children.

The black cat rubbed itself against her breasts, the gray cat was frolicking with the longest lock of hair, while the wild cat was rolling on the pale cat, one above, the other below, a rapid coil, turning in the opposite direction in a horrible tangle./

Le chat noir se frottait contre ses seins, le chat gris folâtrait avec la mèche la plus longue, pendant que le chat fauve se roulait sur le chat blême, l'un dessus, l'autre dessous, bobines enragées, tournant en sens inverse et mêlant l'écheveau très affreusement. (Rachilde 1993, 23)

Laure experiences an orgy on the rooftops in which the cats became interlaced in a confused and upside-down frenzy. The chaos of the cats mating, infusing human with beast, shatters fixed conceptions of sexuality and identity, turning them literally and figuratively “on their heads.”

The expressions “one above,” “the other below” and “turning in the opposite direction” present a perverse version of the nonsexual jumbled, tumbling “flying course between man and animal” between Anatole and Vermillon in *Manette Salomon* (Goncourt 1996, 229), which fuses together the two species. According to Debarati Sanyal, Laure’s intermingling with beasts mocks naturalistic theories on hereditary as determining one’s fate as well as gender stereotypes of women being closer to animals than men (Sanyal 2006, 147). Sanyal writes, “In the absence of utopian spaces for alternative identities and desires, the body itself becomes a crucial site for resistance of the dominant modes of production and reproduction” (Sanyal 2006, 148). As I will later discuss, the “utopian space” found in the novel is on the rooftop, immediately outside of the home, where Laure can escape the need for companionship with her rationally minded, dominant lover through her liaisons with cats.

Laure’s familial connection with her pet cat challenges traditional definitions of motherhood. When Laure encounters Lion for the first time, she crawls and watches him “on four legs/*à quatre pattes*,” altering her position to that of an animal:

the young woman contemplated him, completely moved by a pure emotion, fairly delighted in the ecstasies of maternity. Isolated by all that could give him the means to react, to come up with *a reason*, according to the bourgeois expression of Henry Alban, she came to love this frail animal with the love of a female animal for her young./

la jeune femme le contemplait tout émuë d'une émotion pure, presque ravie dans les extases de la maternité. Isolée de tout ce qui pouvait lui donner les moyens de réagir, de se faire une raison, selon l'expression bourgeoise d'Henri Alban, elle s'était mise à aimer ce frêle animal d'un amour de femelle pour son petit. (Rachilde 1993, 142)

On the one hand, this passage reinforces stereotypes about women being closer to nature—juxtaposing Laure's “emotion” with Henri's “reason.” Laure is a “*femelle*,” a word used for animals. On the other, it reveals a special communion that escapes masculine understanding, echoing, albeit in a very different historical context, Donovan and Adams' emphasis on compassion and love as part of the feminist care ethic, which focuses on attentiveness to both animal suffering and animal welfare (Donovan and Adams 2007, 3). One could draw parallels between Laure and Lion's intimacy and Virginia Woolf's imagined connection between Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her dog in *Flush* (1933). In Weil's interpretation of the book, she argues that the love between dog and mistress not only shatters taboos regarding kinship and intimacy between species but also liberates the patriarchal constraints that both subjects endure (Weil 2012, 81–85). Furthermore, love between humans and pets help expand one's identity beyond the narrow scope of the human (Weil 2012, 84).

The same year as Woolf's text was published, Colette, who attended Rachilde's salon every Tuesday, published a similar story to *L'Animale* titled *La Chatte* (1933), which may enhance our reading of *L'Animale* (1893). Colette sent a dedicated copy of her novella to Rachilde, which read, “To Rachilde, the story of her territory, – everything that is cat-like belongs to her. Her friend, Colette/À Rachilde, *Cette histoire de son pays, – tout ce qui est chat lui appartient. Son amie, Colette*” (Dauphiné 1991, 65). In Colette's tale, Camille, a fast-driving modern female who is obsessed with roadsters, is jealous of her fiancé Alain's extreme affection for his cat Saha—which he treats almost as a mistress or a child. Camille attempts to kill her feline rival by throwing her off the balcony, but the cat survives. Camille's lack of affection for the cat challenges the assumption that women are compassionate, maternal and closer to animals than men. While Camille speeds off in a car, Alain sits hand in hand with his cat with fall foliage in the background. “Alain half reclining played, with one palm straightened and made hollow like a paw, with the first chestnuts of August, green and spiky/ *Alain à demi couché jouait, d'une paume adroite et creusée en patte, avec les premiers marrons d'août, verts et hérisrés*” (Colette 1933, 165). With Camille, a modern woman who smokes, drives fast and unapologetically walks around naked, this novel ends with Alain experiencing a catlike metamorphosis—thus, the man becomes domestic as the woman becomes liberated. As this novella was produced in the decades leading to French women's suffrage in 1945, it illustrates the stark contrast of *L'Animale* in

which cats were linked to tensions regarding the containment and liberation of females. Additionally, in contrast to Saha, a treasure from Alain's childhood who represents for him the comfort and stability of family life, Lion is a feral cat that is brought into a domestic interior and experiences difficulties adjusting. "She found him in the street, next to the mouth of a gutter, stuck on the sidewalk/*Elle l'avait trouvé dans la rue, près d'une bouche d'égout, accroché au trottoir*" (Rachilde 1993, 142). Both Lion and Laure, like many women in the nineteenth century, occupy an unstable space between familial tranquility and life in the gutter.

6.4 FROM BALCONIES TO GLASS CEILINGS: WORKING WOMEN IN MODERNITY

The fact that women were afforded some freedom outside of the home at the end of the nineteenth century but still could not fully support themselves strengthens their parallel to cats. Historians have argued that the *fin de siècle* was a time of crisis, during which traditional republican and family values collapsed. Instead, the Belle Époque could be considered a moment of societal and feminine progress rather than moral degeneration (Roberts 2005, 4). As Roberts writes, "In rejecting a strictly domestic future, then, the new woman could be counted among those *fin-de-siècle* rebels who broadly challenged liberal ideals, thus initiating their disintegration or decay" (Roberts 2005, 4). One ideology that "New Women" subverted was the assumption that women were destined to be wives and mothers. This concept was threatening to the order of the *Patrie*, which had assigned women the duty of raising upright male citizens.

While girls were allowed an education, most vocational schools prepared them for familial duties, such as sewing, household management and child-rearing (Elwitt 1975, 283). Although approximately one-third of laborers were women in 1866, most worked as maids or clothing and textile producers (Linda Clark 2008, 6). Operating either in industrial factories or in the home, the women of modernity, like Rachilde's characters, were infused into domestic and machine life. In addition, many working women during this time were forced into prostitution, which was legal with restrictions, just to afford basic necessities such as food, clothing and toiletries. In 1878, it was estimated that there were 23,000 unregistered prostitutes in France (Larousse 1991, np). Although women had made social progress, many still depended on liaisons with men for economic

stability. The rhetoric of the Third Republic gave the impression of supporting gender equality. However, in actuality, women were not granted equal rights as citizens. Article 213 of the Napoleonic Code ordered that women must submit to their husbands and exercise their “*marital duty/devoir conjugale*” (Plazy 2003, 8). It was often necessary that women turn to marriage, an institution which Rachilde claimed to despise despite her own marital status, to temper economic insecurity (Daubié 1870, 13).

In *L'Animale*, Laure is declared unfit for marriage because of her past sexual experience. The protagonist is thus neither a wife, nor a mother, nor a professional woman. Her ambiguous role illustrates the lack of clear identity for many women during the *fin de siècle* and the difficulty for women to gain independence. When Laure believes that her lover Henri has returned for her:

She forgot her sad musings of the day, her abandonment in the abyss of her crystal cage of yellow silk; she even forgot her quasi-philosophical reflections about women who are the intermediaries between the feline species and the human species./

Elle oubliait ses songes tristes de la journée, son abandon au fond de sa cage de cristal et de soie jaune; elle oubliait même ses réflexions quasi philosophiques à propos des femmes qui sont les intermédiaires entre l'espèce féline et l'espèce humaine. (Rachilde 1993, 154)

Laure, trapped in a photographer's apartment with no means of building a life on her own, is like an animal trapped in a cage or a housecat waiting for its master. Claiming to occupy the space between humanity and animality, Laure reveals the fact that she has no established position in modern society.

Laure's cage is at once industrial and natural—made of silk and crystal—possibly referencing the Crystal Palace of London, which exhibited new examples of technology during the Great Exhibition of 1851. Glass became an increasingly common building material in Paris during the second half of the nineteenth century, which Walter Benjamin describes as means of constructing a dreamlike utopia of industrial capitalism (2003, 7). Detailing the proliferation of glass in the Third Republic, Hannah Scott argues that the material served as a barrier between women and children and the public sphere (Scott 2016, 20). While glass or crystal gives the phantasmagoric illusion of freedom, it binds Laure within transparent walls in a luxurious cage. After Laure's lover departs and she is left alone

with her pet cat, the two suffer from poverty and starvation. “She had to create new resources, but luxury pets do not work, and shivering, Laure thought about the only career permitted for pretty females—prostitution/*Il lui faudrait se créer de nouvelles ressources, mais les bêtes de luxe ne travaillent pas, et Laure songea en frissonnant à ce seul métier permis aux jolies femelles, à la prostitution*” (233). Laure, once a kept woman (or a luxury pet), worries about becoming like “the young, skinny cats from the gutters/*ces jeunes chats maigres des gouttières*” (Rachilde 1993, 233). Without any vocational training, Laure’s only means of survival is prostitution. She exclaims: “Let’s see! I have to choose: fall off a rooftop and be smashed on the street or find a man” (Rachilde 1993, 241). Like a cat in the city, if Laure wants to survive, she must leave the rooftops and become the companion of a man.

Echoing Gervaise Macquart’s desperation in Zola’s *L’Assommoir* (1877), Laure is forced to turn to the city streets. “She wanted a man, and she would bravely hunt her game until the light of day!... Walking along the feverous boulevards, in this humid weather, releasing violent odors from all of the perfume shops and flower stands, she was whipped by violent desires/*Elle voulait un homme et elle chasserait son gibier bravement jusqu’au petit jour!... À se promener dans la fièvre des boulevards, par ce temps mou, dégageant des odeurs violentes de tous les magasins de parfumerie et de tous les éventaires de fleurs, elle fut fouettée de violents désirs*” (Rachilde 1993, 244). Rather than as a victim, Laure is depicted here as a wild cat that stalks her prey (“*gibier*”) within the flowers sold in the concrete jungle of Paris. The protagonist’s sexual desire, and not just financial desperation, is a driving motive for her to find a man. Rachilde envelopes the natural within the urbane setting of the city, illustrating that animal drives still lie in the heart of modern civilization.

The numerous references to gutters, sidewalks and streets in *L’Animale* establish the connection between alley cats and prostitutes. This lexical field portrays an urban phenomenon, in which creatures are forced to forage the city streets. Laure, like the city cat, occupies an “in between space” between urbanite and beast. Laure is the embodiment of the modern woman who is bound by the laws of nature but still must function as part of the urban machine. It is thus fitting that Laure eventually does have a liaison in the Bois de Boulogne, a forest within Paris. In this passage, Laure’s comparison to a cat is empowering, and the hunted becomes the hunter: “The she-wolfs and lionesses are not dishonored because they want to eat a man!/*Et les louves et les lionnes ne sont pas déshonorées parce*

qu'elles veulent manger de l'homme!" (Rachilde 1993, 244). Rather than depending on a male for food, the protagonists in *L'Animale* and *La Panthère* become man-eaters. As Ziegler points out, "Both tales show woman's brain being used in the service of her instincts, keeping claws and hunting skills sharp, causing her to shun what Rachilde would qualify as the emasculated status of the indoor house pet that is watered, fed, and groomed into helplessness" (Ziegler 1998, 146). Whereas the feral cat is a scavenger, the lioness is a predator in her pseudo-natural environment.

Whether seen as lionesses or, in the words of Degas, "dirty rat girls," women's perceived connection with animals was both a sign of empowerment and degradation in the art world. The École des Beaux-Arts did not permit women until 1897, a fact that the *Journal des Femmes Artistes* contested, prompting them to publish several pleas for the government to open art schools to women. In 1891, Élisabeth-Sophie Chéron, an artist, wrote an open letter to the government: "For the past sixty centuries, man has believed himself to be the King of Creation and will keep women in servitude/*Voilà soixante siècles que l'homme se croit roi de la création et tiendra la femme en servitude*" (Chéron 1891, 5). Chéron dismisses the biblical creation myth that man dominates over all other creatures—arguing that women can be creators as well. Chéron's complaint suggests a shift in world-view concerning the place of Man in the sense of both males and mankind, not only in the artistic sphere but also in the world at large. That same year, the journal praised animal painter Rosa Bonheur, who was admitted to the Jury in April 1891 and portrayed the female artist as one whose sensitivity toward other creatures makes her an outstanding creator (1891, 2).

In contrast, the perceived interchangeability between women and animals in the second half of the nineteenth century is misogynistic in Degas' representation of ballerinas and of lower-class subjects as rats or "little monkey girls" (Richardson 2002). Degas' chauvinistic mission corresponded with rise of popular entertainment forms that would epitomize Belle Époque Paris in the years to come. According to art historian John Richardson, by the time Degas was painting ballerinas, the golden age of ballet had long been over and ballet was no longer considered a great art. "Ballet had sunk to the level of kitschy interludes in operas—interludes that allowed bored operagoers enticing glimpses of women's usually concealed legs" (Richardson 2002).

In *L'Animale*, the opera is replaced by the rooftops of Paris, a stage for a ballet of cats: "and the others pirouetting, lifting themselves off their sharp claws, like ballet dancers left themselves on their pointed toes, made

their tails wave beneath twinkling stars, crystal flowers blossoming on fabulous furry stems or fire jets at the end of lashing whips/*et les autres, pirouettant, s'enlevant sur leurs griffes aiguës, comme des danseuses de ballet s'enlevant sur leurs pointes, faisaient onduler leurs queues au bout desquelles scintillaient des étoiles, fleurs de cristal s'épanouissant sur de fabuleuses tiges poilues ou jets de feu terminant des coups de fouet*" (Rachilde 1993, 24). Like Degas, Rachilde reduces the art form of ballet to a series of animal movements. The "pirouette" of the dancing cat is a natural expression of the body forgoing any training or perfection of the human form. The scene is described in terms of spectacular imagery—the sparkling stars and the crystal flowers are like gas lamps and set decorations, illuminated by fireworks and set to the beat of the lashing of tails. As the filmmaker Jean Renoir observed when accompanying his father Pierre-August, the impressionist painter, to the Cirque Fernando near Pigalle, "The flames of gas undulating under the wind currents spread an enchanting glow on the riders, the acrobats and the dancers in tutu/*Les flammèches de gaz ondulant sous les courants d'air répandaient une lueur chantante sur les écuyères, acrobates et danseuses en tutu*" (Plazy 2003, 131).

L'Animale coincides with the popularity of Belle Époque performances in dance halls, café concerts and cabarets such as Le Chat Noir in Montmartre. This infamous nightclub known for its iconic poster of a black cat was the meeting ground for writers, musicians and artists such as Laforgue, Erik Satie, Verlaine and Toulouse-Lautrec and, at least once, Sarah Bernhardt. In fact, Louis Germont, a theater critic, is reported to have said of Bernhardt: "Never was a woman more woman, in other words, more feline, more undulous, more troubling" (Roberts 2005, 172).

In addition to weekly discussions of literature and art exhibitions, there were nightly performances such as singing, dancing and a puppet theater, which evolved into the spectacular Théâtre d'Ombres, for which machinery created changes in light and special effects (Stephen Herbert 2002, 73). Rodolphe Salis, an aspiring painter, opened a meeting place for the Hydropaths, a group of poets and writers, in 1881 at 84 Boulevard Rochechouart (Fields 1993, 10, Galbally 66). According to legend, the cabaret was named after a mangy stray black cat that was found during its renovation, which became its mascot for its wild and deviant nightlife. However, more likely, Salis chose the name because the black cat had been a common character in French tales and had become a symbol of artistic and sexual freedom (Fields 1993, 11). Similarly, at the turn of the century, a cat named Jules inhabited the Café de Suède and sat beside the writers

and artists who frequented the establishment and always seemed to be “reading” (Docquois 1895, 4).

In addition to linking felines and the bohemian, *L'Animale* highlights the perceived relationship between cats and the spectacular.

Didn't the black cat dream, on a carnival night, of having encountered a living star, a somber comet carrying a floss silk train? Who knows if the large black cat didn't dream ... of falling from a fantastic leap, its four legs on a Persian moon or an angora star?/

Le chat noir n'avait-il pas rêvé, une nuit de carnaval, de rencontrer un astre vivant, une comète sombre portant une traîne de soie floche? Qui sait si le grand chat noir ne songeait pas, les soirs de rareté des chats, à tomber d'un bond fantastique, les quatre pattes sur une lune aux yeux pers, ou une étoile angora? (Rachilde 1993, 24)

The cats' adventures on the rooftop are a carnivalesque adventure of debauchery that releases the imagination. The interrogations “Didn't the black cat dream/*Le chat noir n'avait-il pas rêvé*” and “Who knows if the large black cat didn't dream/*Qui sait si le grand chat noir ne songeait pas*” echo Michel de Montaigne's famous question: “When I play with my cat, who knows if I am more of a pastime for her than she is for me?/*Quand je me joue avec ma chatte, qui sait si elle passe son temps de moi plus que je ne fais d'elle?*” (II, 332). The formulation “who knows/*qui sait*” refuses the assumption that humans understand animal behavior and opens the possibility that animals can think, feel and, in Rachilde's case, dream or imagine. In this sense, Rachilde espouses a similar criticism of Western metaphysics, which glorifies supposed human rationality, to Derrida, who challenges “thinking about what is meant by living, speaking, dying, being, and world as in being-in-the-world or being-within-the world, or being-with, being-before, being-behind, being-after, being and following [...]” (Derrida 2008, 11) In *L'Animale*, the Persian moon and the angora star reappropriate the night sky within the conceptual framework of the black cat, rather than a human perspective. Cats in the moonlight became a common image of the late nineteenth century. Adolphe Willette's sign of a black cat sitting on a crescent moon could be found at the entryway of Le Chat Noir, inviting its audience to view nocturnal spectacles through new eyes (Fields 1993, 13).

As Laure stares at the felines on her rooftop, the cats move about “All the working fireplaces, the army of thin, of distant, of indecisive beings, are barely outlined in the insane depths, in which squads are commanded

by giant factory smokestacks/*toutes les cheminées travailleuses, l'armée des maigres, des lointaines, des indécises, à peine esquissées dans des profondeurs folles, dont les escadrons sont commandés par les géantes cheminées des usines*" (Rachilde 1993, 21). Rachilde creates a particular aesthetic involving a cat-woman, surrounded by a band of cats, leaping off buildings in the shadows of the cityscape in the moonlight. This scene conjures up imagery found later in the *Batman* series (created in 1939) of comic books, films and television programs, and the RKO Pictures film *Cat People* (1942). Similar to popular culture, the author links the urban images of chimneys and factories with marginalization ("thin, distant, indecisive beings") and combat ("army" and "squad"). The city is portrayed as both urban jungle and battlefield, in which marginal creatures slip through the cracks to survive.

As outdoor spaces that are still attached to the bourgeois apartment building, the rooftop and balcony are examples of nebulous zones that are free of clear social codes within a rigidly planned city. Plans for the restructuring of Paris were initially developed by le Comte de Rambuteau under Louis Philippe in 1833 after a cholera outbreak that had claimed approximately 18,000 lives the previous year (Larbodiére 2012, 6–11). Haussmann continued in a massive scale by demolishing most of medieval Paris and reconstructing the city within a series of vertical and horizontal axes. The baron razed squalid housing developments in which up to 20 people would be living in a 25-square-meter apartment and replaced them with standardized, stone apartment buildings with strict building codes (Larbodiére 2012, 6).

A Haussmannian apartment building typically had five to seven floors, with balconies in the spacious apartments on the second floor, typically owned by the rich. The attic rooms on the top floor were often inhabited by the domestic help or were sometimes used as artist's workshops. As a former photographer's studio on the sixth floor, Laure's small but well-decorated apartment provides accesses to the mansard roof, which was a key feature of Haussmann-era buildings. "This small photographer's apartment on the sixth floor did not have an attic. The ceiling was the roof without a barrier between them. On this unified roof, one could hear the hopping of sparrows and the swallows/*Ce petit appartement de photographe situé au sixième n'avait pas de grenier, le plafond était le toit, et on s'était abstenu de le grillager. Sur cette toiture unie, on pouvait, à la saison, entendre sautiller les moineaux, les hirondelles*" (Rachilde 1993, 19).

6.5 CINEMATIC CATS

Haussmann's renovations were inherently paradoxical. Although he employed the top architects from the traditional Grands Écoles, he insisted upon the use of modern materials "iron, nothing but iron/*du fer, rien que le fer*" (Haussmann 1979, 490). This material, as Benjamin points out, was the first artificial building material (2003, 4). Haussmann also focused on creating green spaces within the urban center. Thus, the cat-woman—who is part modern woman, part ancient lioness perched upon hilltops of concrete and steel—is paradigmatic of post-Haussmannian Paris. Cats dwelled within alleyways and on balconies and rooftops of the neatly organized city. Huysmans claims that he saw hundreds of feral cats refuged on roofs, feasting upon crawling rats or cat food generously brought by the public. "There also are the cats of Halle-aux-vins; and it was a great joy for me to contemplate these three hundred independent creatures on top of the house of Fossés-Saint-Bernard/*Il y a aussi les chats de la Halle-aux-vins; et c'était pour moi une grande joie d'yeux que de contempler ces trois cents indépendants du haut d'une maison de la rue des Fossés-Saint-Bernard où perchait un mien ami*" (Huysmans in Docquois 1895, 170).

Also crawling with "independent cats," Laure's roof is a

bizarre garden, planted with metal pipes, flowery weathervanes, frightening solitude ... whose wild grasses were represented by the rustling of scrap iron and the roughness of the roof tiles, a formidable country of which she became queen of the hour of the felines./

bizarre jardin, planté de tuyaux de tôle, fleuri de girouettes, solitude effrayante où soufflait une bise enragée, désert de pierre dont les folles herbes étaient représentées par le hérissement de la ferraille et les rugosités des tuiles, formidable pays dont elle devenait la reine à l'heure des chevauchées félines. (Rachilde 1993, 194)

The fantastical garden of tubes and stone is indicative of the nineteenth-century use of artificial materials to eradicate and replace plant life, as well as the displacement from rural to urban life. Transitioning from the lush countryside to the increasingly industrialized city, Laure's affinity with urban, feral cats represents an intermediary between the vegetal and the mechanic.

In Laure's fantastic world, she is the queen of the urban jungle and cats are her royal subjects. The term "girouette," meaning weathervane or someone who easily changes one's mind, refers to the metal roosters spinning on

top of Paris buildings whose direction could not be fixed—indicating both social and agricultural mobility of the Third Republic. Fusing the rural and the industrial, Adolphe Alphand, whom Haussmann hired to build and renovate parks, converted the quarry of Buttes Chaumont to an enormous park with an artificial mountain, lake, grotto and waterfall (Robert Herbert 1988, 142). Benjamin emphasizes the way in which technological innovations, from architecture to the proto-cinematic panoramas, created by moving paintings moved with a crank, mimicked nature. “One sought tirelessly, through technical devices, to make panoramas the scene of a perfect imitation of nature. An attempt was made to reproduce the changing daylight in the landscape, the rising of the moon, the rush of the waterfalls” (Benjamin 2003, 5). Through the use of technology, city dwellers were able to transport the countryside into the city (Benjamin 2003, 6). In the tradition of panoramas, Henri Rivière used “magic lamps” and puppets behind painted slides to give the illusion of one scene dissolving into the next in the Chat Noir cabaret “to have evoked a fleeting fairy-tale world, a dream that vanished before the ravished eye had plumbed to the mystery of gossamer fragility” (Stephen Herbert 2002, 74). Similarly, in 1894, one year after Rachilde published *L'Animale*, Etienne Jules Marey, distinguished French physiologist created the world’s first cat film, which later served to solve the problem of whether a cat always landed on its feet while falling.

Like the shadow box theater of the Chat Noir cabaret or the Panoramas that captured the industrial landscapes of Haussmannized Paris, the rooftops in *L'Animale* are a fleeting fantastical space where anything is possible. Laure opens her eyes, dries her tears and blinks in disbelief:

[...] she was ecstatic. For a moment, the smokestacks amused her, for there were all sorts of them. Smokestacks covered with a mushroom retained by thin bridles, with top hats, with halos working during the day, drawing on the fresh air images of piety; old chimneys, in country doormat./

[...] elle s'extasia. Un moment, les cheminées l'amusèrent, car il y en avait de toutes les espèces. Des cheminées coiffées d'un champignon retenu par de minces brides, avec des chapeaux très haut de forme, avec des nimbes travaillés à jour, dessinant sur l'air pur des images de piété; des cheminées bonnes vieilles, en paillasson de campagne. (Rachilde 1993, 21)

In the phantasmagoric spectacle on the rooftop, chimneys are transformed into a variety of species and scenes from everyday life—from men in top hats to doormats.

This citation evokes the entertaining and seemingly magical illusions provided by technological innovations in art such as the Chat Noir shadow box theater. In his discussion of panoramas, Benjamin writes, “One sought tirelessly, through technical devices, to make panoramas the scenes of a perfect imitation of nature” giving the illusion of a pastoral landscape through the use of machines (2003, 5). Rachilde’s passage also resembles Manet’s illustration for Champfleury’s *Les Chats* (1870) of a black-and-white cat on an angular roof with serpentine tails waving in the haze of the Parisian night sky. In the center stands a tall, dark smokestack, with prolonged black forms lurking in the distance. Industry, with its power to transform metal cylinders into mysterious creatures of the night, lies at the very heart of this print, which could be widely reproduced through printing technology. The cats, as animals trapped into a technological world, embody the human condition of the industrial era. Kete argues, “The cat’s absorption within bourgeois culture signals not merely the neutralization of the qualities it represented, but the abandonment in the late nineteenth century of organic metaphors for modernity” (Kete 1995, 135). According to the historian, this abandonment led to the later machine aesthetics of Fascism and Futurism. I propose a variation on Kete’s claim, arguing that during the Belle Époque, Rachilde enfolds animals within the urban machine and muddles distinctions between the artificial/natural, human/animal and man/woman.

In *L’Animale*, this phantasmagoric theater is also a temporary space of feminine liberation. “A shadow wandered from smokestack to smokestack, and the young woman, isolated from the rest of the earth, a hundred leagues from the civilized world, forgetting the laws and customs to remember that she was as free as the wind that untied her hair/ *Une ombre déambula de cheminée en cheminée, et la jeune femme, isolée du reste de la terre, à cent lieues du monde civilisé, oubliant les lois et les mœurs pour ne se rappeler qu’elle était aussi libre que le vent qui dénouait ses cheveux*” (Rachilde 1993, 21). As a shadow, like those of the shadow box theater, moves across chimneys, Laure enters an enchanted no man’s land removed from the constraints of civilization. With wind untying her hair, she becomes a liberated, Amazon woman pillaring above the cityscape. Similar to the moving panoramas studied by Benjamin, the roof becomes an artificial pasture, where the cat-woman can recall her bucolic upbringing through idylls, short pastoral poems or paintings.

Rachilde also could be alluding to the “Laüstic” (Nightingale), written by Marie de France in the twelfth century, implying that Laure’s relation-

ship with her lover is as confining as an arranged marriage in a medieval fortress. Her Haussmann-era apartment, which is “a former photographer’s workshop, becomes a sort of glass cage where one could hear the rare bird, the bird of exotic countries where one does not understand its ardent song/*un ancien atelier de photographe, devint une sorte de cage vitrée où il allait entendre chanter l’oiseau rare, l’oiseau des pays exotiques dont il ne comprenait pas la chanson ardente*” (Rachilde 1993, 141). In de France’s tale, a woman who speaks with her lover at night claims to sit by the window to hear the song of the nightingale, which her brutish husband kills. Rachilde portrays the imprisoned Laure as a captive bird, creating beautiful forms of expression, but whose song is not understood by her male captor.

6.6 AUTHOR ANIMAL

Similar to the character in Marie de France’s tale who temporarily escapes her prison by sitting at the window, the caged Laure experiences a moment of freedom by watching the cats outside. “And Laure stayed faithful to him. Believing herself to be happy the whole year, until this night of nervous depravation during which, on a crystal roof, she saw cats dance in the moonlight!/*Et Laure lui demeura fidèle, se crut heureuse toute une année, jusqu'à cette nuit de détraquement nerveux durant laquelle, sur un toit de cristal, elle vit danser des chats au clair de lune!*” (Rachilde 1993, 141). Like the song of the bird, the dance of the cats implies that female animals are capable of various arts. The dynamic form of cat-art performed outdoors transcends the enclosed apartment, which crystalizes the woman’s place within the home. The novelist proposes a creative practice that is not fixed or stagnant—the mobility of art due to technical artifice corresponds to the social mobility of women. In this passage, animal-art that is specifically linked to the female is a means of temporally freeing women from social constraints. Although Rachilde revolted against women’s writing, the possible reference to one of the earliest known French female authors could suggest the empowering nature of female literature about animals.

Rachilde’s fantastic literary imagination gave birth to an avant-garde novel that subverts convention. Being in touch with one’s animal nature is a means of disconnecting from rational thought and undermining metaphysical constructs and their linguistic limitations. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, the notion of “becoming animal” causes creative ruptures in conventional discourse and “it breaks hermeneutic interpretation”

(Deleuze and Guattari 1975, 142). Rubin writes, cats' "independent nature made them symbols of freedom and unconventionality. It was these aspects which the avant-garde artists and writers would find attractive" (Rubin 2003, 10).

As a rebellious spirit, Rachilde herself identified with cats and is legendary for her affection for animals. The author lived among birds, goats, two dogs, a ferret and her cat Minouflette; she also belonged to la Société protectrice des animaux and won several medals for her animal activism (Mélanges Rachilde 1983, 77–78). In fact, she claimed to be an intermediary between the human and natural world. "I barely belong to the human species and am much closer to a species of animal" (Rachilde 1926b, 3). Rachilde does not identify with being a writer, but rather an animal that barks or meows. She claims:

This is where I must confess being, without any literature. Under the cloak of a woman writer, I remain psychologically stripped of everything. People have tried to tame me. I have tried to tame people. The result was always a series of misunderstandings that still exist! Perhaps I should have meowed, barked and screamed rather than write, translating myself by using the horrible process of writing a novel./

Je très peu parrie de l'espèce humaine et je suis beaucoup plus proche de l'espèce animale. C'est la que je dois avouer, sans aucune littérature. Sous le manteau de la femme de lettres, je reste, psychologiquement, dénuée de tout. Des gens ont essayé de m'apprivoiser. J'ai essayé d'apprivoiser des gens. Le résultat fut une série de malentendus qui dure encore !...Peut-être aurais-je mieux fait de miauler, d'aboyer, de hurler que d'écrire, d'espérer me traduire en me servant du détestable procédé romanesque. (Rachilde 1926b, 2)

Rachilde dismisses the assumed role of being a female writer as merely a cloak that masks her natural state as an uncivilized creature. The use of the past conditional tense illustrates regret that she has expressed herself through writing and not animal cries: "Now, I don't understand, at least not in terms of human usage. I hear the care in one's voice that it covers up, at least for me, the noise of the articulated word. Thus, I am charmed by the sound of this voice or I am horrified by it and I don't bother analyzing the speech/*Je ne comprends jamais, du moins selon l'usage humain. J'entends tellement le soin de la voix qu'il couvre, pour moi, le bruit de la parole articulée. Alors, ou je suis charmée par le son de cette voix, ou j'en suis horrifiée et je ne prends pas la peine d'analyser le discours*" (Rachilde 1926b, 2–3).

Focusing on the sound or tone of words and the sensation they produce, the author aims to have a visceral impact on the reader rather than an intellectual one. Of course, the complex vocabulary found in Rachilde's novels easily undermines this claim. In her statement, Rachilde reverses the Cartesian emphasis on the ability to decipher meaning from words rather than the capacity to hear or parrot sounds as a fundamental point of demarcation between human and animal. Instead, Rachilde privileges a heightened sensitivity to perceiving "care" in one's voice, which has the effect of "charming" or "horrifying her." This priority over emotional understanding over supposed reason is a cliché attributed to females that supporters of the feminist care ethic have reappropriated as one of their highest values. Furthermore, through her "translation," Rachilde's literature treats animals as both characters and coauthors, giving a voice to the voiceless. Colette, her friend and protégée, considers the cat's purrs and meows as part of literary dialogue that need not respond to the male character's inquiries of "what" and "why":

—What do you mean, meow? And why meow? Is it a manner of speaking?

—Meow insisted the cat. Meow.../

—Comment, me-rrouin? Et pourquoi me-rrouin? Est-ce une manière de parler?

—Me-rrouin, insista la chatte, me-rrouin.... (Colette 1933, 13)

It is possible that Rachilde and Colette "meow" in their works because they are affirming the particular mode of communication for this species. As Donovan and Adams write, the feminist ethic of care "calls for a renewed emphasis on dialogue with animals, learning their communication systems, reading their body language phenomenologically, and taking these communications seriously in our ethical decisions" (Donovan and Adams 2007, 4). Interestingly, in Colette's novel, it is the male protagonist Alain who attempts to decode Saha's language, whereas Camille attempts to destroy her, thus subverting the notion that the feminist care tradition only applies to women. Colette, thus, debunks the ways in which men are "socialized to consider compassion for animals as unmanly" (Donovan and Adams 2007, 3).

Rachilde's statement could also be likened to what Marie Darrieussecq calls "*écriture de cochon*" in her 1996 postmodern novel *Truismes (Pig Tales)*, in which a woman becomes a sow that writes using her hooves to hold the pen. It is well known that Rachilde rejected *écriture féminine* and

desired to be considered to be on par with male writers such as Baudelaire. Even if Rachilde's lurid prose is classified in the same genre as other male Decadent authors, much of her style remains uniquely hers. Like Darrieussecq, Rachilde's comparison of her own writing to that of animals could be a means of distancing her writings from traditional humanist literature, which is most typically created by men. Their scandalous accounts of female to animal metamorphoses as well as tales of bestiality and feminine lust represent a departure from more conventional novels. Anat Pick writes in the context of the contemporary novel *Pig Tales*, "If Darrieussecq avoids explicitly affirming, under the auspices of universal humanism, women's dignity and agency, this is because she is out to contest the very inventory of humanism: dignity, autonomy, subjectivity, rationality, morality and language" (Pick 2011, 100). Although *Pig Tales* is a radical novel written from the perspective (and in the perceived style of) a sow, one could argue that *L'Animale*, in many ways, contests the framework of humanism from a male-centered viewpoint. Rachilde does indeed belong within the canon of *écriture féminine*, not by writing from a female perspective, but by "writing about the production of the feminine in literature" (Weil 2006, 153). Rachilde articulates a problem posed by other later theorists, including Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, about acknowledging difference without essentializing femininity. What exactly makes writing "*écriture féminine*" is impossible to pinpoint other than it dismantles patriarchal systems and totalizing narratives (Weil 2006, 161). As Cixous writes, "It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate" (Cixous 1976, 883).

Although it is questionable whether no authority can oppress the "cat-woman," Cixous' statement is, in part, applicable to Rachilde's writing. The substantive "*L'Animale*" itself is an invented word, feminizing the masculine "animal," thus creating new linguistic possibilities and conceptual frameworks within literature. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, "Write like a dog that digs his hole, a rat which makes his den. And, to do that, to find one's point of underdevelopment, one's own dialect, one's own developing world to oneself, one's desert to oneself/*Écrire comme un chien qui fait son trou, un rat qui fait son terrier. Et, pour cela, trouver son propre point de sous-développement, son propre patois, son tiers monde à soi, son désert à soi*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1975, 33). In writing from a minoritarian perspective, a person can find one's own unique language and carve one's own unique niche, escaping the oppression of received

ideas or literary canons. In some ways, Rachilde's revolutionary writing predates Cixous' battle cry for women writers "to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project" (Cixous 1976, 875). This revolt is rich with possible meanings and artistic forms: "You can't talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their streams of phantasms is incredible" (Cixous 1976, 876).

However, *L'Animale* is ambiguous and difficult to categorize as being either revolutionary or conservative because Rachilde herself claims to despise feminism. In the novel, although Laure is free from customary female roles, she is still bound by her economic attachment to men. As Sanyal writes of Rachilde, "Her resolutely anti-feminist stance, her Decadent elitism, and general hostility to progressive, social or political agendas, make it difficult to assign emancipatory politics to her fiction" (Sanyal 2006, 140). Rachilde writes, "No, I'm not a feminist. I don't want to vote because it would bore me to deal with politics" (in Soldin 2011, 22). Of course, Rachilde is not an exception when it comes to refusing the feminist label. Simone de Beauvoir herself rejected the term as well as do post-structuralist female authors such as Monique Wittig, Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, typically regarded as feminist in America (Weil 2006, 160). In the case of Rachilde, the author considered herself to be an individual and a nonconformist, but she was not a spokesperson for a political movement. Certainly, her work is more open to interpretation than a definitive political platform that advocates for specific rights. Her novels could be an example of revolutionary "minor literature" because they do not overturn society but reflect ruptures in the status quo.

Rachel Mesch argues that Rachilde's proclaimed intention "should not prevent us from recognizing the ways in which Rachilde's writing may have interrogated relationships among sexuality, language and power that much later feminist theorists would explore explicitly" (Mesch 2006, 124). As Haraway writes in the "Companion Species Manifesto," which proposes both an organic and a technical feminist theory that considers human relationships with pets and machines as a means of subverting typological thinking, "Dozens of feminist writers have refused both relativism and universalism. Subjects, objects, kinds, races, species, genres, and genders are the products of their relating. None of this work is about finding sweet and nice 'feminine' worlds and knowledges free of the ravages and productivities of power" (2015, 7). The rabid Lion's penetration

of the bourgeois interior is a refusal of “sweet and nice ‘feminine worlds.’” However, far from Haraway’s affirmation, Laure is smashed on the sidewalk rather than able to triumphantly stand on her own.

Rachilde’s protagonist predates the comic book character of Catwoman, which made its debut appearance as “The Cat” in the first issue of the serial comic book *Batman* in 1940. Bob Kane, the cocreator of Catwoman, said, “I always felt that women were feline” (in Les Daniels 2004, 42). In the Tim Burton film *Batman Returns* (1992), Selina Kyle, a timid, unwed secretary, is pushed out of a corporate office window and is covered with street cats, yet survives. Physically transformed by this experience, the eventual supervillain becomes the empowered Catwoman who shreds all traces of clichéd, childish female identity. Black cat in arm, Selina enters her spinster apartment, throws her stuffed animals in the garbage disposal and blackens her dollhouse with spray paint. She tears apart its pink-walled interior and prepares to wreak havoc on the streets of Gotham.

As a multitude of cats creep through her window, Selina sews claws onto her vinyl feline costume in front of a glowing neon light that reads “Hell Here.” Selina taps into a supposedly darker, more powerful aspect of the feminine—the violent female animal—which overturns human constructions of woman as meek and subservient. However, during the transitory period of the Third Republic, feminism was a nascent concept and the *feline fatale* could sometimes be tamed. Rachilde’s enigmatic characters reflect the uncertainty of this time period. As Laure is both animal and human, liberated and oppressed, urban and rural, and spiritual and demonic, so were the creatures of *fin de siècle* France.

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusion: Henri Rousseau and Synthetic Naïveté

In 1905, a pack of wild beasts invaded the Salon d'Automne. In the flattened jungle of Rousseau's imagination, a lion claws a petrified antelope under green leaves stacked like piles of paper. In the distance, a tiger crouches on a tree branch with its paw raised as if about to strike. No space separates the figures from the dense foliage behind them, unifying the animals with their environment. Although Rousseau was not considered a fauve painter, *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope* helped christen the Fauvist movement. Upon viewing this painting alongside the thick pastel daubs of Matisse and Derain, Louis Vauxcelles, a critic for *Gil Blas* Illustrated Supplement, famously wrote on October 17, 1905, "The candor of these busts surprises in the middle of the orgy of pure tones: Donatello amongst the wild cats/*La candeur de ces bustes surprend au milieu de l'orgie des tons purs: Donatello chez les fauves*" (Vauxcelles 1905, 2) (Fig. 7.1).

With this exhibition, the artist-animal trope entered the twentieth century. Fauves, or big cats, refer not only to the subject matter but also the artists' techniques—as if the simplistic forms in cheerful colors were created from a cat walking in paint and dragging its paws across the canvas. This "orgy" of colorful claw marks undermined the grandeur of the Quattrocento-style sculptures also found within the exhibition (Green 2000, 15). It was as if Donatello, rather than sculpting in the Palazzo Medici, walked among lions and tigers in a painted jungle.



Fig. 7.1 Henri Rousseau. *The Equatorial Jungle*, 1909. National Gallery of Art. Open Access. United States Public Domain

As a genius alongside fauves, Rousseau embodies the qualities that the Goncourt brothers, Zola, Laforgue, Mirbeau and Rachilde sought. A provincial transplant-turned customs officer, Rousseau did not begin to paint until his 40s and was mocked by critics. The *douanier* was entirely self-educated, claiming to have “no master other than nature” (Ireson 2005, 25). His flat landscapes could be seen as products of what Laforgue considers a “natural eye,” absent of knowledge of depth perception (Laforgue 1986, II 329). In fact, the tiger in his first animal painting, *Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!)* (1891), possesses a large, circular, childlike eye.

The predator lies at an impossible angle, with one leg behind a patch of grass and the other leg in front of the grass, suspended in mid-air. Its tail disappears and reappears behind another square of greenery. Such a supposedly nonhuman vision challenges our conceptions of space and defies logic—thus opening our minds to new and creative ways of perceiving.

At the same time, Rousseau painted his primitive, tropical scenes within the artificial construction of the Jardin des Plantes, built in the Latin Quarter, the historical center of scholarship in France. His work could thus be compared to *Manette Salomon*, which portrays the garden as haven for ostracized artists and exotic animals. Rousseau paints a prelapsarian utopia where “wild beast and human partake in a single life. That life can be regarded as the all-absorbing presence of Nature” (Shattuck 1984, 93). The painter, like the garden, creates the fantasy of a Shangri-la, where human and animal coexist peacefully—unspoiled by the polluted city that surrounds it. His figures, reminiscent of the African tribal art that inspired Picasso, also suggest the colonialist fantasy of a return to a distant land where humans are one with all living creatures.

In *The Dream* (1910), Rousseau blends together animals, vegetation and imaginary beings that would never be found together in reality. The artist shares such hybrid eukaryotic forms in common with Rachilde—who demolishes the boundaries between animal, human and vegetable along with breaking down societal and creative constraints. In the painting, Rousseau includes a half-monkey, half-human wearing a skirt and playing the flute and a nude woman reclining on a sofa in the middle of the jungle. This erotic, dreamlike imagery dissolves the rules of logic and accepts the possibility of human/animal becomings. Perhaps the reason why Rousseau’s paintings truly do incarnate the spirit of the Jardin des Plantes is because they both represent amalgamations of many different forms of life, both real and imaginary, in a single space.

Because the painter overlaps multiple sources to produce one coherent image (Ireson 2005, 21), art historians liken his paintings to both synthetic cubism and to digital photographic editing. For example, in *The Merry Jesters* (1906), Rousseau places a panther beneath two monkeys. The animals are surrounded by flat, overlapping foliage that appears as if it were cut out of green construction paper and glued onto the canvas. A viewer could make the obvious comparison to Georges Braque’s and Picasso’s *papier-collé* collages dating from 1912 to 1914, the beginning of synthetic cubism. It could thus be argued that the artist-animal myth, and Rousseau as its incarnate, is an integral part of the foundations of modern art.

Why is this trope so central to the aesthetics of modernity? The artist-animal represents the possibility of a genuine connection between humans and other forms of life. It is fostered by the insight of evolutionary science, which placed man within, and not above, a greater web of existence. However, we should recognize that this acute interest in the nonhuman was a reaction to the eradication of wildlife due to modern industry and urban planning. As threats of war, ecological decline and the dominance of machine technology become more and more eminent during the Anthropocene Era, the reverie of a safe haven becomes all the more necessary. The intermediary of art and artifice is a means of accessing flora and fauna. Before the turn of the century, the role of art thus transformed, first of all, to preserve the memory of species. Secondly, visual art and its literary counterpart created a fantastic space—much like the modern zoo—where one can coexist with animals.

Thus, to return to the essential questions raised in this book: Does the narrative that artists are animal-like reinforce and glorify the oppression of the minor figures of the nineteenth century—including imprisoned animals, bohemian artists, colonialized subjects, subjugated women and subdued urbanites? Or could our physiological and behavioral identification with animals, as minor subjects, be empowering? Ironically, in the works of fiction studied in this book, the myth of the “artist as animal” represents both liberation and containment. Although written in the context of the twentieth-century cyborg subverting modern dualisms, Haraway’s statement that “irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true” (Haraway 1991, 150) is applicable to the figure of the artist-animal.

We have witnessed a progression from the Second Empire to the *fin de siècle* regarding the interest in both animals and the avant-garde in nineteenth-century France. *Manette Salomon* and *Thérèse Raquin* portray the ambivalence of a public that saw the creative potential of animals but chastised those who are supposedly most “animalistic” and therefore most marginal. Furthermore, in *Manette Salomon*, while the characters express an avant-garde contempt for traditional institutions, they are dependent on these institutions for their very survival. In *Thérèse Raquin*, the uncouth yet innovative Laurent is like a wild beast roaming the city, which must be tranquilized and put to death. This brawny churl begins a legacy for the avant-gardists to come.

In Decadent works of literature, by contrast, we witnessed more of an affirmation of radical creative practices and their relation to other species. Although Laforgue's ideal vision must be filtered through glass panels, his meditations on aquariums affirm nontraditional and nonhuman ways of seeing. Mirbeau's *In the Sky* recasts a Zolaesque figure of the artist/assassin to play the part of van Gogh. However, Mirbeau is unique in that the work of art "becomes animal" itself and thus escapes the tyranny of the author's intentions, theories and beliefs. The other possibility for emancipation for Mirbeau is not a retreat into nature in the topographic sense, but a retreat into the perception of nature in one's own mind. These works construct the notion that by tapping into the "animal" part of the self, meaning the repressed fear, rage and terror that exist deep within any civilized being, they can stir the imagination and spark creative insights. However, the works also warn that if a person becomes too affiliated with animals, he or she may lose touch with humanity. However, this binary construction of "humanity," often meaning an elite, well-educated, well-bred European male, was an idea that no longer made sense in a diverse, upwardly mobile society, and should indeed be destroyed. At the end of Rachilde's novel, the rabid cat slays the human woman along with the connotations that "womanhood" often carried at this time. The literary transformation from person to *fauve* is a means of shedding the limiting ideology of what humans ought to be and allowing us to discover who we are within the greater scheme of life. Furthermore, these texts all suggest the interdependent relationship between all creatures.

Art unites humans and animals in the nineteenth century. While the myth of the artist-animal is born out of artifice, it also suggests the revolutionary notion that we may share creative faculties with other species. The enigmatic functioning of nonhuman animals runs counter to the dominant ways of recognizing the world. According to Uexküll's *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, a fly may view a coach on a city street as a dark swirl, and a mollusk may view it as a faded contrast between light and dark (2010, 68). Could our awareness of alternative modes of perception inspire novel and unique artistic renderings? The works of art produced from the Second Empire to the *fin de siècle* were truly a revolution in perception—from Pissarro's fields of yellow and green dots to Morisot's whirling female cherry pickers. The branches sway so dynamically, the painting all but comes alive.

It is by reading the mostly unknown works of the writers who knew and defended the avant-gardists of the second half of the nineteenth century that we may have a better insight into their specific cultural context. Scholars have not rigorously discussed the importance of evolutionary theory and animality in the works of the Goncourt brothers, Laforgue, Zola, Mirbeau and Rachilde. These fields of thought are both essential to understanding a particular aesthetic of this period.

In addition to bringing these works of artistic animal fiction to light, this book challenges our assumptions about what it means to be an animal versus human, both in the nineteenth century and today. Some of the criticism of the works studied in this project has implied that animals are poor imitations of human beings or that they are symbols of human failure. However, as we have seen, many of the passages portray animals as creative beings that spark artistic inspiration. Just as Darwin aestheticizes honeycombs and birds' nests as works of art that are exempt from human thought, traditions and rules, the literary impressionists sought creative freedom through contact with one's more instinctual faculties. The notion that we may have something to learn from animals threatens our political and philosophical investment in being human, and it undermines our notions of creative achievement. For this reason, although this book argues that these works of fiction merit wider readership and more critical attention, they will probably, with the exception of *Thérèse Raquin*, remain minor works. After all, who is willing to place Degas' ballerinas on the same instinctual level as a spider's web?

Whether their technique is instinctive or calculated, the impressionists and the artists of the Belle Époque are still the most famous and most celebrated names in the history of art. The impressionists' affiliation with nature, in particular, is perhaps what most attracts the urban viewer to their paintings. Even if signs of wildlife are not common in most modern cities, Steinlen's *Chat noir* glares in the background of countless computer screens. Degas' horses stampede through living rooms. Monet's water lilies brighten up sterile office walls, giving us an imaginary window to a tranquil and idyllic garden in spite of our hectic, modern lives. Perhaps beyond our love of this beauty, our age owes more reflection and respect to the nineteenth-century literature that sought to record, examine and enhance an aesthetic that seeks to bridge the divide between humans and all other forms of life (Fig. 7.2).

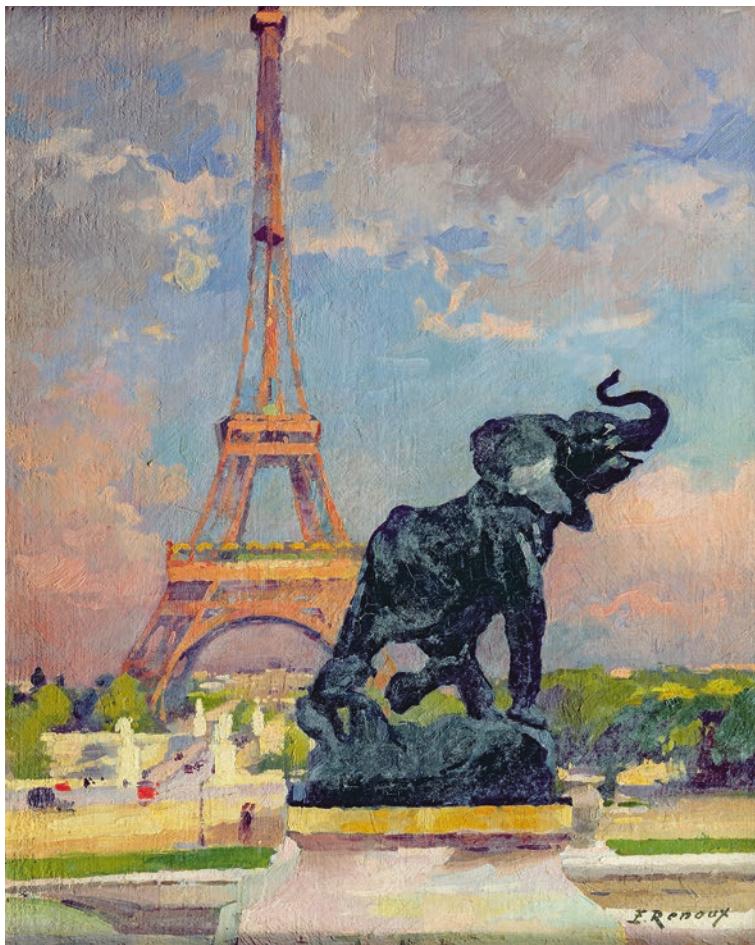


Fig. 7.2 Renoux, Jules Ernest (1863–1932). *The Eiffel Tower and the Elephant by Fremiet* (oil on canvas) / Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée du Petit-Palais, France. Bridgeman Images

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¹ Note: Page numbers followed by ‘n’ refer to notes.

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